On the 3rd of December 1989, Venezuelans went to the polls for the first time to directly elect their local and regional political leaders. A process of government decentralization was initiated with direct elections of municipal mayors and regional state governors. Since 1958, the political system had been dominated by two political parties, the social democratic AD (Acción Democrática) and Christian democratic COPEI, both strongly centralized parties. The system of strongly dominant political parties is often referred to as *partyarchy*, with penetration of organized social and political activities. Notwithstanding, the AD-COPEI partyarchy experienced a relatively rapid process of undermining from 1989, losing control over important municipalities, governorships and municipal councils. The municipal, regional and national elections of 1998 and 2000 changed the political panorama even more. Several entirely new political parties have emerged. The MVR (Movimiento V República) party of current President Hugo Chávez presents the most dramatic and rapid rise in this context. But similarly, other parties associated with decentralization have achieved increased political influence. Theoretically, a combination of actors’ rational choices, and, more process-structural approaches, helps to theoretically understand the political transformations related to decentralization and its implications for the party system. The study demonstrates that the party system and political decentralization are intimately connected and dependent of each other. This study describes and analyzes the “encounter” between the Venezuelan party system and the decentralization reform.

**RICKARD LALANDER**, born in Uppsala, Sweden, in 1964, is a political scientist and research associate of the Ibero-American Center (Renvall Institute) at the University of Helsinki, and the Institute of Latin American Studies at Stockholm University. He is also occasionally guest researcher of several academic institutions in Latin America and has written a number of articles on the political development of Venezuela in international scientific journals.
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The Venezuelan Regional States

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http://www.mipunto.com/venezuelavirtual/mapas/mapa_distribucion.jsp
Suicide of the Elephants? Venezuelan Decentralization between Partyarchy and Chavismo.

Political Map of Venezuela
Risky Business

A motley crew of friends and colleagues has been involved in the processes of the present work. Even though these lines are the first, they were written last, only hours before sending the manuscript to Finland. In 1990 Mike Blondie Bonaparte convinced me to take a break from the Stockholm rock’n’roll scene of the time, which had hitherto dominated our lives, and introduced me to Venezuela. Since I was so well received there during my first stay, thanks to people like Enrique Aranguren and the late Michel Dagher, I remained in Venezuela several more weeks after Mike had returned to Sweden. My interest in Venezuela thus took root nearly one and a half decades ago, politically a most turbulent period, just after the Caracazo riots and the implementation of the decentralization reform. Even if I was then spending more time on the beaches of Caribe and Falcón than in political and academic institutions, it was impossible not to feel that Venezuela stood at a decisive crossroads.

From those days in 1991 to the doctoral program in Latin American studies of the Ibero-American Center at Helsinki University, the road has indeed been stormy and continually changing in all respects. Since my first visit to Venezuela I have returned fifteen times, and I have dedicated the great majority of my academic papers and essays to various aspects of the political, social, economic and cultural development of the nation. Without the intention to neglect anybody, therefore risky business, I will start by expressing my gratitude to my Finnish tutors and great friends Jussi Pakkasvirta and Teivo Teivainen at the Ibero-American Center, as well as Martti Pärssinen, Ilkka Ruohonen, Pekka Valtonen, Jouni Pirttijärvi, Florencia Quesada, and other Finnish and international research colleagues. The constructive comments of Carsten Anckar and Tapio Raunio were of great value for the improvements of the study. Anne Cleaves is due special thanks for revisions of language and style, and Tina Löfgren for layout suggestions.

At the Institute of Latin American Studies at Stockholm University, I have been supported since 1996, and my first and deepest thanks go to Weine Karlsson and Magnus Mörner, without whom I probably would not have continued in this field. I cannot mention all of the other colleagues, but in the research team Jaime Behar, Andrés Rivarola, Staffan Löfving, Alejandro González, Birgitta Genberg, Paulina Rytkönen, Charlotta Widmark, Akhil Malaki, Mona Rosendahl and James Wardally have been important in exchanging ideas and comments. Thanks are also due to Anneli Ragvalls, José
Curtó, Dag Retsö, Karin Paulsen and librarians Margareta Björling and Britt Johansson. El Prefecto Johan Falk and former institutional director Rune Rydén have proved to be sincere supporters of my projects. My closest Swedish political scientist colleague and great friend, Magnus Lembke, has contributed with brilliant ideas, especially during our after-work sessions at La Boya, Cazador Verde or Kellys’. The methodological suggestions by Lasse Lindström and Fredrik Ugglö have been crucial as well. Professor Axel Hadenius in Uppsala, who was my tutor for the master’s thesis, has meant a great deal for my academic formation. As for the financial aspects, the Helge Ax:son Johnson Foundation contributed important economic support during the initial years of field research. The Institute of Latin American Studies, NorFA, Lars Hierta’s Foundation, as well as the Faculty of Arts and the AMICI Foundation at Helsinki University, have likewise contributed with important funding for travel. 

Mary Pinzón, Roberto Villarroel and Gerson Palacios of the Swedish-Venezuelan Association have always shown themselves to be brilliant friends and discussion partners on our Venezuelan realities. My critical friend Kari Tapio has to be included as well. In the same context, I have to emphasize the importance of my family. My mother Margareta and brother Philip always believed in my Venezuelan project, and Dr Fippe also went there with me in 2000 and shared adventures in Vargas, Caracas, Choroní and Mérida. My sister Eva and father Folke likewise deserve credit. Of course, a special thought goes to Silva and my beloved daughters Edith and Anna, without whom nothing of this would have been possible. In 1996 Silva and Edith spent three weeks with me in Venezuela, and the stay in Choroní is never to be forgotten. Returning to Venezuela, in the state of Vargas, my Venezuelan soul-brother Crispin Núñez changed my life and he has traveled around Venezuela with me, frequently accompanied by the voice and rhythm of Héctor Lavoe. Raiza del Carmen Delgado and Dayana with family in Punta de Mulato have been reasons enough to always return to Venezuela. Atilano Hidalgo Rosas of La Noticia Caliente Z-100 and Ramón Chuleta Mayora in Macuto are other Vargas personalities who contributed to the enrichment of my stays, as also Omar of the Tiburones Baseball Club, Policía Metropolitano Orlando Guédez and baywatch Pancho of Playa A-Macuto. In Caracas I benefited immensely from a semester of doctoral study at the Center of Development Studies –

Suicide of the Elephants? Venezuelan Decentralization between Partyarchy and Chavismo.

CENDES—during 2001. In addition to all my qualitative and populist colleagues∗∗ in the seminars, like Haidée Deutsch, Silvia de Suarez, William Ojeda and Antonio José Monagas, I would particularly mention Nelly Arenas, Margarita López Maya, Luis Gómez Calcaño and Carlos Mascareño, who have all inspired me in my work. At the Universidad Católica Andrés Bello in Caracas, the most recent of my Venezuelan research bases, philosopher Oscar Reyes has contributed with important institutional arrangements and an invaluable contact network. On distinct occasions, Gabrielle Guérón, Sadio Garavini di Turno, Arturo Tremont, Jesús Urbieeta, David López, Andrea Tavares and José Albornóz have been helpful in the course of my research project.

The beautiful Andean city of Mérida has more and more become my main Venezuelan academic center, and at the Universidad de Los Andes I have been associate researcher at the Department of Comparative Politics –CIPCOM–. The support and company of Alfredo Ramos Jiménez, José Antonio Rivas Leone, Luis Madueño and Francisco García at the center has been of great value and joy, also outside our academic activities. As Luis once told me: No solo de estímulo intelectual vive el hombre.

Ex-mayor Fortunato González Cruz, Enrique Andara, Chris Birkbeck, Jaime Grimaldo and Humberto Morales are other valued friends at the ULA. In Mérida I also made friends with Angel Márquez, and despite the fact that his profession is decentralization, we almost never discuss research topics. Rather, in Caracas and Catia La Mar we have spent hours comparing the virtuosity of guitarists like Ritchie Blackmore, Frank Marino, Michael Schenker and Uli Jon Roth. Angel’s wife Irma Blanco also merits an acknowledgment, as well as his teachers Adolfo Vargas and Zaira Reverón at the Simón Bolívar University.

I became familiar with the border city of San Cristóbal on the 4th of February 1992, when I was returning to Venezuela from a stay in Colombia and was obliged to remain in the city for a week due to the attempted coup d’état. There I have to mention my brilliant friend and photographer Ana B. and sociologist

∗∗ The seminars in which we coincided were precisely qualitative research methods and Latin American populism.
Suicide of the Elephants? Venezuelan Decentralization between Partyarchy and Chavismo.

Samuel López Rivas. In the suffocating heat of the oil metropolis of Maracaibo, Gleccy Leal has always been a remarkable host, driver and Santana accompanist. At the University of Zulia and at beautiful maracucho restaurants I greatly enjoyed the meetings and car rides with political scientists Maria Elena Romero and José Enrique Molina. In Bolívar I am grateful to my friend Tello “Avión” Benítez, for the equilibristic labor of taking me across the Orinoco River and into the Guayana steel belt. In Aragua I enjoyed conversations and social activities with the late Camastrón Torres and Cupertino Peña, not only for their contributions to my research on the MAS party and Aragua unionism.

Among my research colleagues in Venezuela, Steve Ellner has been incredibly helpful, since my first serious fieldwork in 1996. Steve has likewise read some of my unfinished manuscripts since then, and at very critical moments, and I do not exaggerate in stating that his comments have been decisive for my work. In the same context, Michael Coppedge is due particular thanks, and Julia Buxton has been a source of inspiration and important in exchanging ideas on a previous draft.

Since my first two lengthy stays in Venezuela, between 1990 and 1992, Crispin, Raiza, Enrique, Michel, Carlos de Souza, Isabel and Gerardo Yannascoli have always been there as the best friends one could ever imagine. A part of me is always there with them. In addition to my lovely children, this dissertation is dedicated to the victims of the 1999 Vargas tragedy and most of all to the resonating memories of my father Folke and Michel Dagher.

Stockholm, September 17, 2004

R.L.
## List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

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<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Acronym/Full Form</th>
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<td>4F</td>
<td>4 de Febrero (Fourth of February)</td>
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<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>Acción Democrática (Democratic Action)</td>
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<tr>
<td>APRA</td>
<td>Alianza Popular Revolucionaria Americana</td>
<td>(Peruvian Social Democratic party)</td>
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<td>CAP</td>
<td>Carlos Andrés Pérez</td>
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<tr>
<td>CD</td>
<td>Coordinadora Democrática</td>
<td>(Democratic Co-ordinator, political alliance)</td>
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<tr>
<td>COPEI</td>
<td>Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente</td>
<td>(Independent, Political, Electoral Organization Committee)</td>
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<tr>
<td>COPRE</td>
<td>Comisión Para la Reforma del Estado</td>
<td>(Commission for the State Reform)</td>
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<td>CTV</td>
<td>Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela</td>
<td>(Venezuelan Workers Confederation)</td>
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<td>FIDES</td>
<td>Fondo Intergubernamental para la Descentralización</td>
<td>(Inter-Governmental Fund for Decentralization)</td>
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<td>IRENE</td>
<td>Integración, Representación y Nueva Esperanza</td>
<td>(Integration, Representation and New Hope)</td>
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<td>LCR</td>
<td>La Causa Radical (Radical Cause)</td>
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<td>LODDT</td>
<td>Ley Orgánica para la Descentralización, Delimitación y Transferencia de Competencias</td>
<td>(The Law of Decentralization, Delimitation and Transfer of competences)</td>
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<td>Ley Orgánica del Régimen Municipal</td>
<td>(Municipal Management Law)</td>
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<td>Movimiento Al Socialismo</td>
<td>(Movement Towards Socialism)</td>
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<td>Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario 200</td>
<td>(Bolivarian Revolutionary Movement 200)</td>
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<td>Movimiento Electoral del Pueblo</td>
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<td>MIR</td>
<td>Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Movement of the Revolutionary Left)</td>
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<td>MVR</td>
<td>Movimiento Quinta República (Fifth Republic Movement)</td>
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<tr>
<td>PCV</td>
<td>Partido Comunista de Venezuela (Communist Party of Venezuela)</td>
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<td>PJ</td>
<td>Primero Justicia (Justice First)</td>
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<td>PP</td>
<td>Polo Patriótico (Patriotic Pole)</td>
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<td>PPT</td>
<td>Patria Para Todos (Fatherland for All)</td>
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<td>PRI</td>
<td>Partido Revolucionario Institucional (Mexican Revolutionary Institutional Party)</td>
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<td>PT</td>
<td>Partido dos Trabalhadores (Brazilian Workers Party)</td>
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<td>UPV</td>
<td>Unión Popular Venezolana (Venezuelan Popular Unity)</td>
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<td>URD</td>
<td>Unión Republicana Democrática (Republican Democratic Unity)</td>
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INTRODUCTION: VENEZUELA’S POLITICAL SYSTEM

There is nothing more difficult to carry out, nor more doubtful of success, nor more dangerous to handle, than to initiate a new order of things. For the reformer has enemies in all those who profit by the old order, and only lukewarm defenders in all those who would profit by the new. (Macchiavelli, *The Prince*)

In the beginning of the Venezuelan democratization there was centralization. The heritage from the Castilian colonial period cast enduring shadows on the institutional and political power system. As in several other Latin American countries, the 19th century faded with struggles between regional “strongmen” and political movements with ambitions to create a political party system around liberals and conservatives, but in Venezuela such a system never took root strongly enough. In modern times, Venezuela was considered for a long time to be a kind of political and economic exception in Latin America, politically due to the nation’s early democratization, and economically due to the immense incomes from the oil industry. While many of its neighboring countries (not Colombia) were governed by military regimes, Venezuela’s democratic system seemed to function quite smoothly with open, direct and competitive elections after the overthrow of the dictator in 1958. Since then, the political system has been dominated by two political parties, the social democratic AD (*Acción Democrática*) and Christian democratic COPEI (*Comité de Organización Política Electoral Independiente*).

Both AD and COPEI have by tradition been strongly centralized parties. Historically, these two parties have dominated national politics, often through strategic pacts and alliances. Between 1973 and 1988 these two together managed to capture between 80 and 93 percent of the vote in every presidential election. Since the late 1980’s, however, this bipartisan hegemonic system has suffered an undermining and challenges from other political actors. The continental economic crisis of the 1980’s affected Venezuela also, even more with declining oil prices on the world market, and since the political establishment could not satisfy societal sectors as before, social and political discontent started to increase. Corruption among politicians and business leaders worsened the situation, and opposition

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politicians as well as academics and “ordinary citizens” blamed the former for the almost universally decreasing socio-economic conditions. A credibility crisis in relation to the political leadership deepened, and to confront this situation a commission for political and administrative reform initiated its work in 1984, with government decentralization as a key ingredient. Formal decentralization in Venezuela was to be implemented in three steps: political, administrative and fiscal, beginning with the political and finishing with the fiscal.

On the 3rd of December 1989, Venezuelans went to the polls for the first time to directly elect their local and regional political leaders. A process of government decentralization was initiated with direct elections of municipal mayors and regional state governors. This was probably pushed forward both by increasing popular discontent as the economic crisis deepened and by a formal process of democratic reform. A large number of scholars argue that the decentralization reforms have generated new dynamics in the party system, including the emergence of a new generation of leaders. Earlier political leaders were concentrated in national directorates and in Congress, but after 1989 a new kind of politicians with regional and local roots appeared, aiming for the posts of governor and mayor, offices that until the late 1980’s were not even open for election.3 During the principal study period (1989-2004), non-traditional political parties like the socialist MAS (Movimiento Al Socialismo) and Causa R (Causa Radical)4 have emerged, also within the decentralization scheme. These parties have seen victories in several municipalities and federal states in the elections of mayors and governors respectively, thus threatening the almost hegemonic position of the two traditional parties (AD and COPEI).

The municipal, regional and national elections of 1998 and 2000 changed the political panorama in Venezuela even more dramatically. Several entirely new political parties have emerged. The MVR (Movimiento V República) of current President Hugo Chávez Frías5 presents the most

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4 Both MAS and Causa R were formed as consequences of a split in 1971 of the Venezuelan Communist Party –PCV– (Partido Comunista de Venezuela).

5 I would like to emphasize that I am well aware of the sub-title of this dissertation’s including the concept of Chavismo; it is not intended to signify a political party system, which partyarchy on the other hand can be classified as. ”Between Partyarchy and Chavismo” refers
dramatic and rapid rise in this context. But similarly, parties associated with decentralization, like Proyecto Venezuela, with regional roots in the important industrial state of Carabobo, Leftist Patria Para Todos –PPT– (Fatherland For All) and the recently founded Primero Justicia, rooted in the Caracas area, are examples of parties that have achieved increased political influence.

For the first time in Venezuelan democratic history, the top political leaders at both regional state and municipal levels are now not necessarily of the same political tendency as the governing party at the national level. With decentralization, the creation of new arenas for political struggle and new rules of the political game are the most obvious and direct political changes. Governorships, mayoralties and municipal councils have become important and legitimized political arenas. The creation of the post of mayor, and the direct elections of them and state governors, opened important new political arenas, giving smaller parties the opportunity to compete in local campaigns and thus get experience in governing.\(^6\) Democratization of the State and political systems, including the party system, was thus a major argument for introducing the decentralization reforms. As Jonathan Fox concludes in an article on Latin America’s emerging local governments since the 1980’s, “The degree of democratization of local government affects the prospects for national democratic governance.”\(^7\)

This book deals with the transformations of the Venezuelan political party system in the context of the decentralization process. Within this framework I raise the question if it is possible at all to explicate and trace changes in a political party system structure through an analysis of the political opening offered via a decentralization reform. Without neglecting other relevant factors related to changes in electoral behavior, I argue that the implications of decentralization can function as a possibility for alternative opposition actors to enter the political and State arenas. In the case of Venezuela, the traditional two-party model has been replaced by a multi-party system during the first decade of decentralization. While I admit that decentralization alone cannot function as the sole explanation for all transformations within the political system, I hold that decentralization

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7 Fox, 1994: 105.
became decisive for profound changes in the party system, as well as voters’ behavior. This is accordingly not a question of a case comparative study; the case is the Venezuelan party system over time. Occasionally, though, I will step partly out from the purely Venezuelan context, particularly in order to check whether some features of the evolution of Venezuelan decentralization and party-system transformations have developed similarly or differently in other Latin American countries, as below.

Decentralization in Latin America

Decentralization of government is not particularly unique to Venezuela; actually it has to be considered more as a continental phenomenon. In Latin America, the processes of decentralization have accelerated significantly since the 1980’s, and in various nations, as Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Argentina, Colombia, Peru and Guatemala. It is obvious that both the demands for, and the introduction of, decentralization coincide with the economic crisis of the decade. Decentralization in the Latin American countries was probably introduced both as a result of an increasing political disenchantment among the population as the economic crisis deepened, and as important steps in the reforms of the democratization of the State. There are exceptions to this tendency, however; in Chile and Argentina decentralization took place during the 1990’s and under rather stable economic conditions. So, to a certain extent there seems to be a causal relationship between economic crisis (and thus weakening of the State) and decentralization. It is probably easier for a State regime to accept and support a decentralization reform (and here by permitting the possible entrance of alternative political actors) in a crisis situation with fewer economic resources to satisfy societal needs and interest groups. At the same time, in the developing world the strong pressure for decentralization also came from multilateral banks, such as the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Decentralization and the promotion of local development and grassroots participation were typically included as fundamental conditions when economic support was given. With respect to this, Guatemalan sociologist and Leftist intellectual Edelberto Torres-Rivas states:

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8 African and Asian countries also have introduced decentralization processes, with mixed experiences and repercussions on the political party systems. (See, e.g., Hadenius, 2003, for a presentation of South Africa and India.) International donors have promoted decentralization in the developing countries of the three continents.

I am always quite skeptical towards the demands and contents of the programs of the multi-lateral banks. Decentralization is a good example. The nation States find themselves in economic crisis, and say OK, let us decentralize and let them handle the situation at municipal and regional level.\textsuperscript{10}

In Venezuela and many other Latin American countries, however, social and political pressure from below and internal factionalist disputes within the parties contributed even more to the reform processes. In a recent paper on political parties and decentralization in the Andean countries (Bolivia, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela), political scientist Kathleen O’Neill proceeds from the question of whether decentralization has improved the political representation in the countries, “either through, or in spite of, political parties.” She focuses on three issue levels:

1) Political electoral participation at distinct government levels,  
2) How political parties have reacted / responded to the opportunities at sub-national level (and if they have been successful), and:  
3) How decentralization possibly changed the career behavior of national level politicians, thus also influencing the political party organization and structure.\textsuperscript{11}

A main result of O’Neill’s findings is that the relationship between political representation and decentralization varies considerably between the countries and also over time within each country. In a general comparison between the Andean countries, though, Colombia stands out as the most decentralized political system (here: government) of the Andean nations. Colombia was one of the region’s earliest decentralizers (that is, speaking not of possible historic federalist traditions but the democratization-decentralization wave of the 1980’s and 90’s), and, as O’Neill argues, also one of the first in the ambition to make decentralization meaningful. The Colombian decentralization process can be divided into two stages: a first step during the presidency of Belisario Betancur (1982-86), and a second with the constitutional assembly of 1990-91. During Betancur’s government, laws of political decentralization were established, which included direct elections of mayors (held in 1988). A complex model for the provision of fiscal resources to the municipal governments, based on population, poverty index, and fiscal efforts was introduced. The second stage of

\textsuperscript{10} Torres-Rivas, interview, Halle, 4 September 1998.  
\textsuperscript{11} O’Neill, 2002: 4.
decentralization in Colombia via the constitutional assembly of 1990-91 introduced direct elections of regional state governors, and also (similarly to the Bolivian system) created automatic transfers to regional governments. Further provisions strengthening local governments were also included.\(^\text{12}\)

In a comparison with other decentralization processes, Peter Spink has presented an ambitious analysis of public administration reforms and decentralization processes in the Latin American countries. He concludes that the Venezuelan decentralization has been without doubt one of the more successful in the continent and the most powerful as to immediate political impacts.\(^\text{13}\) The Venezuelan decentralization process also stands out in the Latin American context for the 1992 reform of the electoral system of party lists at the municipal level, introduced with the objective of reinforcing voter identification with elected councilmen.\(^\text{14}\) However, compared with Bolivia’s decentralization reforms since 1994, probably the most well-planned in the continent, the Venezuelan decentralization still lacks clarity with regard to the division of powers between the different political-territorial levels of government, and to the financial aspects of the local and regional state governments as well. The Bolivian municipal governments are guaranteed 20 percent of the national budget, while the regional governments (prefecturas departamentales) receive 40 percent, on a per-capita basis, and the money is transferred automatically from the center. On the other hand, though, Bolivians do not elect their regional political leaders; the prefectos are still appointed by the President of the Republic.\(^\text{15}\) So, while Bolivia and Colombia guarantee economic decentralization to the municipalities, Venezuela, like Brazil, for example, can lay claim to being more democratically decentralized with respect to popular electoral possibilities of influencing political authorities at the regional level.

**Why Decentralization in 1989?**

The year 1989 became a watershed in modern Venezuelan history and includes both historic and symbolic changes, ruptures of traditions and values, related not only to decentralization and its implications for the political system as a whole. Directly related to the changes in political

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\(^\text{13}\) Spink, 1998: 142-144.

\(^\text{14}\) Nickson, 1995: 67.

\(^\text{15}\) Altman & Lalander, 2003; Lee van Cott, 2000; and the Bolivian Law of Popular Participation.
behavior and preferences among the Venezuelans was also a new macroeconomic approach by the government in 1989, resulting in mass riots in protest against the contents of the economic program, remembered among Venezuelans as the Caracazo. Most scholars believe that Venezuelans’ attitudes toward the democratic system as a whole, and to its institutions and representatives, changed drastically in 1989.16

There are several direct or indirect connections between the decentralization processes and the sociopolitical and socio-economic pressure that became evident from 1989 onwards and which will contribute to an understanding of why decentralization was introduced exactly then, and not before as planned. There are of course important conjunctural aspects to understanding the changes in political behavior and electoral preferences, which contributed to the political decision-making procedures and the pressure from below to advance the decentralization reforms. In Venezuela decentralization was introduced after a decade of economic recession and worsened socio-economic conditions for the population.

**Partyarchy**

With regard to democracy, post-1958 Venezuela has shown some basic characteristics of a democratic system, such as party and organization plurality, the right of the citizens to vote and a judicial system independent of the government. Voting has been made an easy procedure. Regarding the State structure, the Venezuelan State comprises a balance of powers between legislative, executive and judicial branches, but as Daniel Levine, for example, emphasizes, in practice the executive is completely dominant.17 The political rules of the game were established through the Punto Fijo Pact in 1958. In this pact the two political parties, together with the most influential representatives of the Venezuelan societal sectors, agreed on the principles of the political system and the methods of avoiding effective rivalry from both the Left and the Right of the political spectrum. The political system in Venezuela since then can be described as a multi-party democracy, but until 1989 AD and COPEI governed. Political stability has been achieved through a party-mediated patronage system where the parties with access to the economic resources of the State have provided social and economic support to particular social groups, such as peasant and workers’ organizations. On the national union scene, AD maintained an almost

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hegemonic position, particularly through its dominating position within the principal trade union confederation, the CTV (*Confederación de Trabajadores de Venezuela*). The political parties have been the mediating channels for political participation in Venezuela. Coppedge asserts that in a partyarchy citizens tend to participate via the political parties or not at all. Non-partisan organizations are rapidly co-opted by one or several parties. As Venezuelan political scientist Juan Carlos Rey stressed in 1989, “The political parties have been converted into the principal – and in practice the exclusive – medium of access to politics for society.”

This system of strongly dominant political parties in Venezuela is often referred to as partyarchy (*partidocracia*), with penetration of organized social and political activities. Thus one cannot emphasize enough the power of the traditional Venezuelan political parties. Michael Coppedge, in his brilliant work on the behavior, functioning and structure of the AD party in a democratic Venezuela, refers to the country as the most extreme case of partyarchy in the democratic world; that is, “a democracy where political parties monopolize the formal political process and politicize society along party lines.” Coppedge likewise asserts that the Punto Fijo Pact functioned for a long time thanks to the partyarchic model. The oil incomes evidently served as fuel for the partyarchic machinery throughout. The concept of “partyarchy” has become generally accepted and frequently used among researchers of Venezuelan and Latin American political development.

Many analysts are agreed that until the late 1980’s, Venezuela had one of the strongest party systems (if not the strongest) among Latin American countries. Venezuelan political scientist Juan Carlos Rey has launched the concept of “Populist System of Conciliation” (often used synonymously with partyarchy) to describe the political system of Venezuela since 1958. Conciliation here refers to the tactical agreements between elite groups.

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The partyarchic concept is not unique to Latin American studies. In studies of the German political system, the rather loaded concept of *parteienstaat* or *politikverdrossenheit* is frequently used. Italian social movement theorists Donatella della Porta and Alberto Vannucci use the term partycracy (*partitocrazia* in Italian) to describe the development of the Italian party system. As they argue, *partitocrazia* refers to “the social and political presence and diffusion of mass parties.... Rather than party government, *partitocrazia* means their domination of, or ambition to dominate, the political system.”

In *Building Democracy in Latin America*, political scientist John Peeler proceeds from a comparative analysis of the Latin American democracies and refers to Venezuela between 1973 and the late 1980’s as presenting “one of the most fully developed democratic party systems outside the advanced industrial democracies.” Further, drawing on Robert Dahl’s classical works on polyarchy as a somewhat more manageable model to measure political democracy, Coppedge makes the following illustrative comparison:

If democracy is government of the people, by the people, for the people, then partyarchy is government of the people, by the parties, for the parties.

In Dahl’s polyarchy model, the minimum conditions for political democracy are:

1) Freedom to form and join organizations,
2) Freedom of expression,
3) Right to vote,
4) Eligibility for public office,
5) Right of political leaders to compete for support,
6) Alternative sources of information,
7) Free and fair elections, and
8) Institutions that make policy-makers accountable to voters through elections and other expressions of preference.

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25 della Porta & Vannucci, 1999: 117. See also Mair, 1997: 140.
“Political systems that meet these requirements are “polyarchies”.” 28 The concept of polyarchy derives linguistically from Greek and means “rule by many,” to distinguish it from “rule by one” (monarchy), “rule by a few” (oligarchy or aristocracy). 29 In the original work on polyarchy by Dahl, Venezuela is categorized as a “near-polyarchic” political system, in lists presented by Dahl regarding the situation in the 1960’s. The only Latin American country that qualified for the category of inclusive polyarchy in 1960 and 1969 was Uruguay. Colombia and Venezuela fell into the near-polyarchic field. Colombia and Venezuela are included, since the basic institutions of a polyarchy emerged fully during the period, despite sporadic violence, and indeed the institutions were fragile. 30 Coppedge does not neglect the classification of Venezuela as a polyarchy regarding the minimum conditions. But whereas other Latin American political systems have suffered from some of the partyarchic features, Venezuela is the country that manifests the highest degree of the symptoms associated with partyarchy, and at the same time an extremely low level of the polyarchy indicators. 31

Decentralization to Confront the Partyarchic Crisis

In order to confront a deepening crisis around the legitimacy and credibility of the Venezuelan political and party systems (as the economic crisis worsened), a Presidential Commission for State Reform, COPRE (Comisión Presidencial Para la Reforma del Estado) was created in 1984. COPRE included representatives from the political parties and particular interest groups, as well as intellectuals. It had six principal objectives: political reforms, decentralization, administration, modernization of public policy and the legal system, and the development of civil society. 32 Decentralization has been highest priority for COPRE among the reforms, as well as being the dimension of State reform that from the beginning generated the highest hopes and expectations for its potential cumulative snowball effects on the political democratic system as a whole. 33

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30 Dahl, 1971: 82-86, 246-249.
33 Combellas, 1997.
At the same time, decentralization has met resistance in various forms since its introduction, and it has been far from clear how the new political and institutional structures and power divisions should function, both in the political parties and in the State institutions concerned. The existing obstacles to decentralization are often present in the behavior of public officials in the State bureaucracy, who for years or decades have been used to acting only on orders from the central government (and the leadership of AD and/or COPEI). Therefore they might resist or refuse to cooperate in the decentralized system. During the Rafael Caldera government from 1994, the decentralization process was halted, since the conditions for its continuation were so uncontrolled and ill defined that things threatened to end up in administrative chaos and an intensification of inequalities, as economic historian Steve Ellner puts it.\footnote{Ellner, 1996: 105-106.}

Political scientist Michael Penfold-Becerra underlines that the reforms of decentralization did not have democratization alone as a main objective, but also (and more indirectly) an ambition to reduce the power of the political actors at the central level,\footnote{Penfold-Becerra, 2000: 14-15.} that is, also changing the internal structures of the political parties. Regarding this relationship between decentralization reforms and partyarchy, Penfold-Becerra quotes a COPRE member: “The movement towards decentralization of the State would necessarily imply a decrease of the discretionality within the political party cúpulas (heads). With the decrease of centralization, the discretionality of the national directories of the political parties would also decrease.”\footnote{Ibid.: 5 (My italics).} Swedish political scientist Axel Hadenius also agrees that decentralization contributed to a break-up of the old monopolistic political tradition.\footnote{Hadenius, 2001 a: 117; Lalander, 2002 a & b; Gómez Calcaño & Patruyo, 1999.}

Returning to Coppedge’s reasoning on partyarchy, one could reach the conclusion that an indirect objective of the decentralization reform was to reduce the partyarchic features of the Venezuelan system. In a former partyarchy, the political opportunities presented by decentralization and the opening of the political system for alternative actors are most observable. Coppedge writes:

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\footnote{Ellner, 1996: 105-106.}
\footnote{Penfold-Becerra, 2000: 14-15.}
\footnote{Ibid.: 5 (My italics).}
\footnote{Hadenius, 2001 a: 117; Lalander, 2002 a & b; Gómez Calcaño & Patruyo, 1999.}
In other societies, some nonparty organizations have enough autonomy to focus their issues and place them on the agenda. In a partyarchy, in which parties are practically the only organizations that can define the terms of the political debate, the agenda is set by political parties alone. The politically penetrated class, sectoral, and regional organizations can express only the interests that have passed through the filter of party interest.\(^{38}\)

Partyarchy had thus become a recognized problem. It is particularly interesting and necessary to understand how the particular political actors (especially within the major political parties) reacted to the decentralization of the political system. Looking back at the period following the 1989 introduction of the reforms, it will be relevant to study why and how AD and COPEI failed (that is, if they did fail) in adapting to the new political circumstances and rules of the game. With such a perspective, the decentralization reforms appear to have had semi-suicidal results for the two parties, since these processes functioned as an opening of the political and State institutional systems and arenas. How can we comprehend the acceptance of the decentralization reforms within the AD leadership?

\(^{38}\) Coppedge, 1994 a: 42-43.
Purpose

Venezuela has experienced various and broad changes in its political and democratic systems since 1989 and the introduction of the processes of decentralization. A major purpose of the present research project is to examine and analyze some aspects of the political changes related to decentralization within the political party system, that is, with the political parties (particularly the party or factional leaders) playing the main roles. Likewise, the political actors of the mayors and the governors are playing main characters, although at the same time it is true that they normally represent a political party. The Presidents of the Republic are immensely important actors, particularly considering the strength of Venezuelan presidentialism, since the process we are studying (decentralization and changes in the political party system) is exactly the political game between the center and the regions and municipalities, and the interaction between each government level. The political party “color” of each political actor on the distinct levels is of relevance in the study of the relations, tensions and interactions between the political representations of each level of government.39

A principal aim of the study is to explicate and describe the variations in the party system structure in the context of the decentralization process from 1989 onwards. Hence, the level of decentralization constitutes the independent variable of the study, while the political party system structure (and its fragmentation) is the dependent variable. The purpose can be perceived as two-folded. On the one hand I aim at explaining variations in the party system structure, and on the other a descriptive ambition regarding the decentralization process and the party system restructuring. As the title suggests, there will be an analysis of the relationships between the dynamics of the political parties (and changes in the party system) and the decentralization processes. Not all possible explanatory factors behind the party system transformation will be thoroughly reviewed; rather, I decided to delimit the focus to the changes associated with decentralization. In the analysis of the complex situations and processes delineated in this introductory chapter, it will be theoretically and analytically necessary to use a mixed methodology for the collection of data, the theoretical approaches and the systematization of the information and material. The study is

39 Lander, 1999. In Venezuela the political parties are identified through colors, white for AD, green for COPEI, orange for MAS, yellow and blue for Causa R, red for MVR, yellow for Proyecto Venezuela-Carabobo, blue for PPT, etc.
primarily qualitative but has a few quantitative supportive elements, particularly illustrative electoral statistical data.

A study of party system transformation requires knowledge, as Coppedge puts it, of the number and relative size of parties (fragmentation) and the levels of party system change (volatility). For this purpose, a majority of party system change researchers use the most obvious units of analysis: the proper political parties. The fragmentation thus occurs within the respective political parties, whereas the volatility concerns the entire party system and its capacity for or tendency to sudden transformations. In this book the fragmentation merits greater attention than the volatility, although both can be used as supportive and illustrative indicators of the research topic. I aim to analyze some important aspects of the Venezuelan party system transformations from the angle of decentralization. As already implicitly indicated, political actors’ rational choices are crucial in the study. However, decisive aspects of important societal and political processes of concern are more specifically of structural character; thus the integrated theoretical starting-point, which will be more thoroughly presented in due course. The structural process theoretical approach analyzes and examines, for example, bureaucratization, centralization and/or decentralization.

Theorists sometimes hold that you cannot compare apples with oranges, since they differ so much from each other. Following that logic in political science, it would be extremely hard to compare political parties with each other. But if you see apples and oranges as fruits, with some similarities and distinctions, like flavor, color, density, size and sweetness. You can likewise look at political parties as organizations with certain characteristics regarding size, leadership style, internal structure, degree of factionalism, alliance ability, ties with civil society, and so on, and then the analysis will be more manageable. From this vantage point, I see an advantage in not doing a case comparative study (between countries) but on one specific party system in the context of one particular reform and its impact on the same system, a study that requires extensibility in time and intensity in

40 Coppedge, 1997: 1.
41 Starrin et al., 1991: 49-50. In fact, Brian Crisp and Daniel Levine use a rather similar mixed theoretical approach, an integrated theoretical perspective with both actors’ rational choice and more process-structural theoretical views on political parties and State-society relations (Crisp & Levine, 1998).
42 See, for example: Anchar, 1998.
space. This book explores the Venezuelan party system and those of its transformations that can be traced to decentralization.

The study will be carried out with some ideas from the social movement theories, and particularly the theories of political opportunity structures, also taking into consideration to a limited extent the dimension of cycles of popular protest. The political opportunity structures hence form a foundation in the integrated theoretical approach. The reasons for using the political opportunity framework in a study of party system change are precisely due to the relationship with decentralization. That is, decentralization viewed as an opening of the political system, allowing the possibility for alternative political actors to enter the political and State arenas, with possible impacts on the party system structure. As mentioned, the analytical tools of party system volatility and fragmentation will contribute to providing indicators pointing more clearly to certain trends or tendencies amidst party system change.

Additionally, a broader State-Society approach will be used (albeit still with a focus on political opportunities in the context of decentralization and party system). Particularly important is the “Political Society”, that is, the scope or space for possible mobilization and interaction for the actors, comparing to a limited extent the ideas of the liberal-pluralist and post-Marxist schools respectively. A changing of the State structure and, with that, the political system might imply new political opportunities, for example, for actors to enter the political system. Decentralization logically signifies that the citizens get closer to the State, and that the State itself is opened up on the lower levels. With decentralization, new channels for participation are opened up and the rules of the political game and the State institutional framework change, which taken together might imply new possibilities for social and political actors to enter the State arena.

I would like to clarify that although I apply an integrated theoretical approach, there is a certain hierarchy in which political opportunity structures prevail, where I decided to include elements from certain other theoretical schools to better suit the research focus of party system changes in the context of decentralization. These supportive approaches hence do not clash with political opportunity structures on one and the same level. Rather, the distinct blocs of the integrated theoretical approach fortify each other and

43 Tarrow, 1994. See also Kriesi, 1995:168.
in combination lead to a clearer and broader grasp of the party system transformations related to decentralization.

**Delimitations**

Even the most comprehensive description done by the best cultural interpreters with the most detailed contextual understanding will drastically simplify, reify, and reduce the reality that has been observed. (...) No description, no matter how thick, and no explanation, no matter how many explanatory factors go into it, comes close to capturing the full “blooming and buzzing” reality of the world.44

A problem area in the process of research and the structuring of the contents of a study is that of delimitation. How many (direct or indirect) explanatory factors, descriptions and analyses are actually necessary and realistic to include in the study? When is it possible to continue the descriptive and analytical process? Reasonably, the researcher has to simplify in these processes. It would be practically impossible to include all possibly relevant aspects related to decentralization and the party system. Robert Dahl emphasized in 1963 the necessity to delimit and focus the study of politics. Modern democracies are not as simple as the political system of Aristotle’s Athens. Political institutions change and the studies of politics have proven to be cumulative.45 Further, the behavior and development of one political system is affected by other political systems; that is, one political system is seldom isolated. Every political system has contacts with other political systems.46 Similarly, every political system depends on economic factors. Here, however, I will have to delimit the economic circumstances to purely structural surrounding aspects, that is, without going in detail into economic policies and statistics (which fall outside the purpose of this study). The unionist perspective will be relevant to consider to a certain limited extent in this study (mainly in the background sections), since the evolution of three of the political main actors, the AD, MAS and Causa R parties, have been characterized by strong links between the party and the labor movement. As stated in the introductory section on partyarchy, corporatist trademarks have particularly characterized the AD governments. COPEI too has had

44 King, Keohane & Verba, 1994: 43.
46 Ibid.: 39.
important ties with trade union organizations. The three parties noted above have used influence on the trade union scene to achieve gains in the decentralization processes.\footnote{Martz, 1966; Ellner, 1986 & 1993a; Hellinger, 1996; Lalander, 1998.}

In this dissertation the focus is concentrated on the political party system, with an ambition to understand the consequences caused by the decentralization reforms within the system. I will thus not go deeply into the division of powers between the distinct political-territorial government levels. I would also like to clarify that within the focus on the party system structure and its transformations, the aspects of social polarization and the relationships between parties and citizens are considered as secondary. Likewise, I will have to limit the cases of new parties that have emerged during the period after 1989 and decentralization, as well as the situation in each of the Venezuelan regional states.

With regard to the municipal level, I will include a selection of illustrative developments and situations. Nonetheless, I must emphasize that in this thesis the regional state level has indeed been given more space; this can be traced to an early decision to concentrate the focus there and, of course, on the relationship with the central national political leaderships. A thorough analysis of decentralization and the party system at the municipal level would have required another methodological point of departure as well as partly distinct empirical material. On the other hand, I will provide illustrative electoral statistics in order to demonstrate the importance of decentralization for the political party system on the municipal level as well, particularly relevant in the case of prestigious municipalities (e.g., Chacao and Libertador in Caracas). Awareness of the development at the municipal level can also serve to check the validity of conclusions based on regional state level analysis. It is worth clarifying that to avoid confusions throughout the study, I chose to make a written distinction between the national \textit{State} (with an upper-case S) and the regional \textit{state} (with a lower-case s). Some instances of direct quotations are excepted from this system; it is hoped that the context will suffice for the appropriate understanding. In the theoretical summary section before the first empirical chapter, a few further explanatory comments on the choices of delimitations are presented.
The democracy perspective in this study is considered to be secondary, but it would be almost impossible to carry out research on decentralization and the party system without entering the field of democratization (as will be demonstrated in the second theoretical chapter). My personal interpretation of some relevant aspects of democratization within the political parties will be manifest in the study and will hopefully constitute valuable research findings on the topic. Thus, in the case of political party internal democracy and democratization related to the decentralization process, the democracy perspective is of prime value for the study.

However, the question of whether decentralization has meant that the party system as a whole and the political and institutional situation in Venezuela have become more or less democratic during the period, will not be more than superficially answered. Besides, these are questions that are impossible to respond to simply with Yes or No. The answers depend crucially on how, when, where and what is being measured or analyzed, as well as the possible political and ideological standpoint of the analyst. Which analytical tools are used? One possibility is to analyze the legal foundations, or relevant statistics; another, the frequency of civic popular protests or other socio-political tendencies, for instance, the mentioned conflicts between the political leaders of the distinct political territorial levels.

Political, administrative and fiscal decentralization entail complicated processes in the national political strategies, and at the same time decentralization competes and conflicts with the centralist tradition, which can lead to possible and probable resistance to any political, economic or institutional change. It will be relevant to touch upon some concrete conflicts between the municipal and regional state leadership in relation to the central government and administrative apparatus, to better understand both the existing obstacles to decentralization and its proper functioning. With regard to the political tensions between the political leaders at the distinct government levels, it will be interesting to observe how these conflicts and tensions show up and develop in practice. This will serve as an illustration of the difficulties related to political reforms and likewise the resistance from elite groups.
Literature, Arguments for the Topic and Operationalization

You study deeply the developments of decentralization and the party system in Venezuela separately, and where these two meet; there you have your doctoral thesis. 48

A lot has been written on Venezuelan decentralization with a primary focus on the division of responsibilities between the distinct political-territorial levels.49 Since my main focus is concentrated on the consequences within the party system caused by the decentralization reforms, it has been necessary to go into theoretical and empirical material both on party systems (and political party behavior) and decentralization (most of all political). I have mainly consulted works by political scientists, historians and sociologists, but also, to a lesser extent, by lawyers, economists and anthropologists, among others. The available literature on party systems is abundant, as on decentralization as well. On party system research, I have consulted, for example, Giovanni Sartori, Robert Dahl, Arend Lijphart and Peter Mair. The theoretical starting point of partyarchy is almost exclusively Michael Coppedge (the scholar who is most associated with the concept). A number of political opportunity theorists help to build up the theoretical framework, most of all Sidney Tarrow and HansPeter Kriesi; likewise, social and political movement scholars provide frameworks directed at party system change in the context of decentralization. The theoretical chapter on decentralization benefits, for example, from studies by Alexis de Tocqueville, Axel Hadenius, Larry Diamond, Jonathan Fox, Robert Putnam, Barbara Geddes and Judith Tendler.

As for the empirical material, a great majority of scientific research on the Venezuelan political system has focused on the oil industry, political pacts and the relationships between elite groups. The literature concerning the early democratization in the 1940’s and the period after the overthrow of the dictator in 1958 has concentrated mainly on AD. A number of books focus on the work of AD’s main founder and central figure, Rómulo Betancourt. The evolution of the Communist Party of Venezuela (PCV) has also been covered, for example, by authors like John Martz and Robert Alexander

48 Conversation with my proposed Venezuelan tutor; Dr Carlos Mascareño, Caracas, 4 June 2001. Tutorial session at the Center of Development Studies –CENDES–.
since the 1960’s. Later contributions on post-1958 Venezuela emphasize (with good reason) corporatist arrangements between the State, political parties and the union and peasant movements. A few of the authorities in this field since the late 1970’s are economic historian Steve Ellner and political scientists David Myers and Daniel Levine.

In the process of gathering material for this dissertation I discovered that when defining the different periods of Venezuelan democracy, the great majority of scholars pay little or no attention to the first government period of Rafael Caldera (1968-73), except for mentioning the peace agreement with the guerrilla. Frequently the Caldera mandate is incorporated by into a larger period, covering also the two previous AD governments from 1958. The regionalization project by Caldera is seldom mentioned. Often it seems that authors have taken an apparent leap over the period, to continue directly with the first government of Carlos Andrés Pérez and the Venezuelan oil-bonanza years, despite the fact that regional institutions that are still functioning were established during the Caldera period. I decided therefore to go a bit more deeply into that area, though I confess that the Caldera regionalization project merits its own study or book, since elements of the relationship between the party system and political-institutional decentralization took root during the period. Thus, this part of the background chapter constitutes a sort of bonus as a contribution to the research field of decentralization and the party system.

Studies of the Venezuelan party system have mainly provided a focus on AD, although since the 1980’s and the deepening of the economic crisis, academics in and outside Venezuela began taking an interest in other institutional arrangements and the development of State reform and democratization. Post-1989 studies have frequently analyzed the crisis (certainly an overused concept in academic works since then) of the Venezuelan system, increase in protest activities, corruption, changes in civic-military relationships, but also decentralization and the functions of civil society. Less has been written on what actually functioned relatively well in Venezuelan institutions. In the late 1990’s an explosion of studies emerged on different aspects of the movement around Hugo Chávez.

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50 Or, as will be defined further on, the Caldera decentralization could rather be classified as deconcentration.
Nevertheless, few academic works focus more deeply on the relationship between the party system and decentralization, except for articles, for example, by Margarita López Maya, Steve Ellner, Michael Penfold-Becerra, Daniel Hellinger, Carlos Navarro, José Molina, Thais Maingón, Friedrich Welsch, José Vicente Carrasquero, Daniel Levine, Brian Crisp, Michael Kulischek, Rosa Amelia González de Pacheco, Maria Pilar García-Guadilla, Nelly Arenas, and Carlos Mascareño. As far as I know, though, the majority of available publications on Venezuelan decentralization (mainly in Spanish) emphasizes and concentrates on the division of power, resources and responsibilities between the distinct political-territorial levels.

True, there is at the same time a lot of material available on the relationship between the party system and decentralization. But, with the exception of the lucid 2001 publication by Julia Buxton, there is no deeper and more concentrated study in book form on the party system and its “encounter” with the decentralization reform and its consequences. But whereas Buxton embraces a broader scope of focus in explaining the failure of political elites and the successful rise of Chávez in the midst of Venezuelan democracy, my study goes more deeply into some aspects of party system transformations related to decentralization. Comparative studies on Latin American decentralization have been published notwithstanding, but so far, few works have focused directly on the political party system. For the above-mentioned reasons (and because of my genuine fascination with the topic) I eventually decided to devote my doctoral thesis to what is presented in this study. I have been further encouraged by my consideration that a thorough analytical study with my particular mixed theoretical approach of the Venezuelan party system and decentralization would constitute a scientific contribution of value, both empirically and theoretically.

53 Buxton, 2001. I personally have some reservations, however, regarding a few aspects already manifest in the somewhat skeptical and negative title of this splendid book, *The Failure of Political Reform in Venezuela*. In due course I will argue that decentralization has been relatively successful in Venezuela, despite its problems and remaining need for further advances in the fields of responsibilities, economic autonomy etc. Buxton also recognizes this observation of mine, including the relative success of the decentralization reform in the purely political context (Buxton, 2003 b).

54 As already mentioned, however, political scientist Kathleen O’Neill (1998 & 2002) has analyzed the development of the relationship between decentralization and the party system in the Andean countries. Likewise, Willis, Garman & Haggard (1999) contribute important comparative conclusions in this field.
Methodological Strategy and Fieldwork

In the research process on the topic described above, analyses of official juridical and constitutional documents, academic studies on the topic (see above), and, no less important, qualitative interviews, both structured and improvised (including a few via e-mail), with key actors in the distinct government levels have been necessary for the study. The interview material can be classified as a sort of cement filling in empirical “holes” in the material obtained through the secondary sources and supporting the hypotheses of the work. My individual applications of the integrated theoretical-analytical approach and the secondary material in combination with the interviews constitute the final outcome of the work. Between 1996 and 2004 a large number of interviews and conversations (a majority of these recorded) have been conducted for the research project. Political leaders, specialized scholars, journalists and other informed persons have been interviewed, both in Venezuela during fieldwork and at international conferences in Miami, Halle, Amsterdam, Dallas, Helsinki and Stockholm, for example. Several of these interviews and conversations have been facilitated through my participation in seminars, conferences, and other academic meetings in Venezuela and elsewhere.

Regarding the criteria for choices of informants, I have tried since the beginning to cover the entire political party spectrum, that is, with interviewees from all major parties (and as much as possible also taking into account factional affiliations within the party). I have gathered my informants partly through a “snowball technique”, that is, in which one contact leads to another, and so on. But my research technique regarding the interviews has also been selective, in that I have asked myself repeatedly during the research process what was missing or necessary to find out (or which political voice or arena was not represented, etc.).

A major purpose of the interviews and conversations (including the more formal ones when I have given lectures or attended conferences in Venezuela) has been to receive input and test key hypotheses on the topics my research project concerns. Another function has been to compare the “knowledge” I have gathered through my interpretations of my reading of academic books and articles (as well as Venezuelan newspapers and

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55 Only a selection of the interviews are mentioned, and of these, the ones that are not referred to in footnotes remain due to the value of their confirmations, corrections and comments on my research findings.
journals, watching Venezuelan TV and listening to radio) with how scholars, politicians and other citizens perceive the political situations and changes. The material obtained through the interviews is of immense value for the study and constitutes a further dimension of new and unique research data on Venezuelan politics. In the interviews with scholars as well as Venezuelan politicians I have aimed at attaining the perception of the informant regarding the transformations of the party system (and the respective parties and factions) in the context of decentralization. However, I frequently encountered difficulties when asking politicians about the factional divisions of their own party and “who was with whom?”(¿quién está con quién?). It appeared to me (i.e., this is my perception) that they might be reluctant to express themselves in case the factional structures changed in a way that would affect them.56

In the year 2000 I was approved as a doctoral candidate in development studies by the Center of Development Studies –CENDES– (Centro de Estudios de Desarrollo) at the Universidad Central de Venezuela in Caracas. I took part in the program for one semester, before continuing officially in the doctoral program at the Ibero-American Center in Helsinki. The semester at CENDES was of immense value, since the courses I took were offered in open seminar form, with participation and presentations by the doctoral candidates, most of them Venezuelan citizens (including well-known politicians). Since 1999 I have spent periods as a guest research fellow at the Center of Comparative Politics (Centro de Política Comparada) –CIPCOM– of the Political Science Department at the Universidad de Los Andes in Mérida.

Bias? Political-Methodological Problems
A constant dilemma for the researcher in social sciences is the real possibility of bias between the researcher and the researched topic (and its actors). In his lecture “Paradox of the Sociologist”, Pierre Bourdieu develops some relevant thoughts on these situations and relationships, and he demonstrates, among other things, that in practice it is impossible to separate theories of knowledge from political theories. All political theories constitute (at least implicitly) a theory of the perception of the social world. In its turn, all theory of perception of the social world is organized according

56 Not that valid for Causa R, where the factionalism has been more openly pronounced. In MAS this secrecy game was observable until 1997-98. Overall, the factionalism has been clearer for an outsider since 1998.
to contradictions, very analogous to those of the natural world. In politics, the problem of knowledge is posed through the relationships between political parties and the masses, and many of the typical questions are actually traced from classical philosophy of knowledge and the relationships between the subject and the object. In the same spirit, Robert Dahl asserts that the values, interests, and curiosity of a researcher logically influence his or her choice of topic. Further, he holds that it is impossible to attain important and relevant criteria only from empirical knowledge. Some kind of valuation is necessary in the situations of decisions and comprehension in the research process. In the same context, neutrality and capacity for scientific objectivity would not be possible without certain social and political conditions.

Methodological problems can turn up in the research process with regard to the relationship between the actors and the analyst. An old indigenous saying holds that “you cannot understand the other unless you have walked in his moccasins.” I do not, however, pretend to go that far; rather, I have aimed at keeping an objective position (as far as possible) in my contacts with informants and research colleagues. I have indeed spent much time with politicians and movement activists during my field studies, assisting meetings in Congress, regional legislative assemblies, governorships, mayoralties, trade union offices (particularly the central CTV building) and present at protest marches and demonstrations. Likewise I have traveled with politicians, scholars and movement activists, at times invited to stay in their homes or go out for a meal or a drink. Very often, the more informal and relaxed meetings have proved to be even more fruitful than the more concentrated and structured ones. As mentioned, I have studied with Venezuelan politicians and social movement leaders at CENDES in Caracas. On several occasions I have also been privileged to participate in Venezuelan radio and TV programs, sometimes invited as a guest together with a leading local, regional or central-level politician, businessman or movement activist.

Sociologist Alberto Melucci holds that there are no preliminary or instrumental phases in these kinds of research projects, that is, stages whose

59 For example, several sessions at the Z-100 FM, la Noticia Caliente in the state of Vargas, with, e.g., the governor and mayor of the Vargas state and municipality respectively.
objective is to instrumentalize the actors in order to gather the information. For Melucci, the initial interview work in the field includes a double purpose: to gather information around the movement/organization of the study, and also to choose a natural group and representatives of the constructed organization. This double purpose creates a delicate situation, since the problem is to find a good connection with the first goal without losing the second. This signifies a need for “honest” gathering of the information, without pressure or false declarations, but with openness as to the objectives of the research. 60 This study is at times consciously normative, for instance when touching upon concepts, values and principles of democracy and democratization. In addition, returning to the possible bias in interviews and seminars, including discussions with scholars on the research topics, I have aimed to bear in mind the possible political party affiliation of the person (most important in Venezuela, where many academics have occupied positions in political parties). But at the same time, the role of academia, particularly in social sciences, is often to function directly or indirectly as a constructive, intellectual political opposition or at least source of ideas on development.

Structural Framework and Contents
This introductory chapter on the study will be rounded off with this presentation of the structure of the dissertation, and with some methodological points of departure. The theoretical section of the dissertation is divided into two chapters. The ambition here is to provide analytical tools for the analysis, understanding and answering of the questions of the methodological points of departure. The first theoretical chapter deals with political opportunities and party system change. Since the political opportunity structures approach is a strong current within social movement theories (SMT), the chapter is initiated with a discussion of some fundamental aspects of relevant SMT research of value for this study. Since we deal with political parties (and party leaders) as protagonic actors in the transformation of the party system in the context of decentralization, this results in the necessity to sort out the possible differences between social and political movements (that is, if there is such a frontier). Before reaching the section on political opportunity structures, an argument about the importance of the party system is presented, followed by a discussion of the political society, that is, the arena of competition between the political actors. The theoretical discussion on the political society and the importance

and functioning of the party system aids a better comprehension of the initial conditions for political actors to mobilize within the Venezuelan political sphere.

As mentioned, the theoretical and analytical ideas of political opportunity structures will be used in considering the decisive importance of political environment for the practical possibilities for social and political organizations to mobilize. The main actors in the political opportunity structures approach are frequently labeled authorities and challengers. Some clarifying theoretical argumentation about this “battlefield” will accordingly follow. An emphasis on popular protests as a strategy of previously marginalized groups of society to create pressure from below on political authorities has become high academic fashion since the mid 1990’s among Latin American and Latin Americanist social science researchers with ambitions to explain political transitions. The argument for including popular protests in this dissertation is that governors and mayors (and alternative political movements) have frequently spearheaded protest activities since the introduction of decentralization. The fundamental institutional and political settings are crucial for the analysis and description. For this purpose, an illustrative logic of analysis model is included, The Politics Model, which embeds not only the actors’ rational choice approaches but also structural conditions and processes.

The political parties play the main roles in the study; therefore the institutional, political and cultural factors that contribute to party transformation deserve particular attention. Some general characteristics of Latin American political parties, including the populist tradition, will also be emphasized. The analytical lenses of populism can here be used to understand certain traits of political culture, as well as periods and developments related to the topic, particularly regarding the “re-centralization” period with the rise of Hugo Chávez since 1998. Populism can frequently conflict with political pluralism and the democratization objectives of decentralization.

In the second theoretical chapter, the main focus is decentralization. First, some arguments for focusing on the regional and local levels are presented, followed by a brief conceptual and historical definition of decentralization. After this, and with Alexis de Tocqueville’s findings from the 1830’s as a point of departure, a discussion is developed mainly about the democratization arguments of decentralization. However, some standpoints
against decentralization are likewise presented. In order to understand the
difficulties related to decentralization reforms in Latin America I have
chosen to go a bit deeper into the arduous elements that frequently are
manifest before and during an intended decentralization reform. The
centralist political, economic and institutional tradition of the Latin
American continent is briefly summarized, and the chapter concludes with a
theoretical and empirical discussion, with illustrative historical examples
from Latin America and Venezuela, of the tradition of local political
strongmen and its consequences. As will be seen, the second theoretical
chapter on decentralization rather functions as a bridge between the party
system–political opportunity chapter and the empirical analytical chapters.
The theoretical chapters are rounded off with a brief summary, connecting
them more clearly to each other as a more manageable point of departure for
the empirical and analytical chapters.

Regarding the empirical chapters of the study and the necessary descriptive
and analytical background sections, it will be relevant to divide the
presentation of Venezuela’s political development related to the party
system and decentralization into distinct periods:

- Formation of the party system (1936-1958)
- Limited pluralism (1958-1968)
- Ripening Phase (1968-1973)
- Attenuated two-party system (1973-1988)
- Fifth Republic (1999- when?)

The first empirical chapter covers the first four periods, that is, from 1936 to
1988, and also represents the era of centralist political tradition. In the first
period, the centralized political system of Venezuela is described as the birth
of the traditional parties. The second period, limited pluralism (limited due
to the exclusion of the Communist Party of Venezuela –PCV–), proceeds
from the overthrow of the dictatorial regime of Marcos Pérez Jiménez and
presents the evolution of the two-party hegemonic political system and some

61 This division of periods is used by Molina & Pérez (1998), among others. The period
between 1968 and 1972, which corresponds to the first COPEI government, is not
mentioned as a proper period by Molina & Pérez. I have decided to make a further division
of the periods with the first COPEI government.
of its characteristics. The third period, the ripening phase (coined by me), when AD for the first time handed over the government to COPEI, comprises both the peace agreement with the Venezuelan Leftist guerrilla movement and reform ambitions in the direction of decentralization. The fourth period covers both the years of the Venezuelan oil boom (1974-78) and thereafter a deepening economic crisis with far-reaching social and political repercussions.

In the 1970’s, political movements that would evolve into political alternatives to AD and COPEI grew strong, and special attention is given to the development of the MAS and Causa R parties. The reason for giving Causa R a bit more space is, among others, that the development of the radical party constitutes a more illustrative example of how a small, local alternative political movement developed and challenged the political authorities and later also took advantage of political openings via decentralization. The chapter concludes with a brief section on the “Latin Americanization” of Venezuela in a more continental context, that is, when the socio-economic standard of the citizens and the institutional sufficiency decreased drastically, which would eventually contribute to the acceleration of the decentralization reforms.

The second empirical chapter covers the first years of decentralization. But, firstly, an analytical description is presented of the preparatory work before the reforms as well as some of the direct and indirect consequences of the decentralization reforms on the political and party system, along with a presentation and analysis of the results of the first decentralized elections, those in 1989 and 1992. Strategies of the various parties and reactions to their perceptions of the opportunities or threats that decentralization embodied are analyzed, including protest activities. The following chapter includes the presidential elections of 1993, most important to study more thoroughly due to the drastic changes they provoked within the party system, to a high degree related to decentralization. Therefore these elections merit special attention. The years following the 1993 elections are relevant to focus from several aspects in the context of the topic of this study. The politics of protest and some viewpoints on Leftist parties amidst decentralization is likewise relevant to review, as well as a few reflections on the status of decentralization in Venezuela during the period.

Regarding the fourth and fifth empirical chapters, these cover the development from November 1998 to the present. The year 1998 marks the
definitive breakdown of the partyarchic tradition, with the triumph of Hugo Chávez and his Fifth Republic Movement (*Movimiento V República*) – MVR – and allies in the presidential elections. A general tendency to credibility crisis marked the traditional political parties, and the elections of 1998 would illustrate the party system at a crossroads, which is a primary argument for giving this period and the elections of 1998 and 2000 relatively more space than the previous ones. The chapters provide several important statistical tables on elections, including comparative ones, in order to achieve a better overview of the party system changes during the period. In addition, there is a presentation of a few new political movements with grassroots approaches, particularly the *Primero Justicia* party. In the fifth chapter, special attention is given to the development of decentralization and the party system in the context of the new government of Hugo Chávez. A discussion of whether the party and political systems have re-centralized with the new regime is included. Another mode of viewing the entire empirical structure is to proceed from partyarchy and centralization and then analytically follow the development of the decentralization reform and the party system fragmentation to arrive at the present situation of *Chavismo* and a possible return to a more centralized political system. The new panorama of the political opposition and some perspectives on the future of the Venezuelan decentralization and party system will round off the chapter. Instead of writing an epilogue after the conclusions, I thus chose to reflect upon a few aspects of the present constitution of the party system and decentralization. Finally, a chapter is dedicated to a brief summary, some relevant conclusions and final remarks on the implications of the decentralization reforms on the Venezuelan political party system.

**Some Methodological Points of Departure**

In order to achieve a more thorough comprehension of the complex research topic I have described, I have found it necessary to develop a few analytical tools in the form of research questions, which are formulated with the support of the theoretical approaches of the study. I have chosen to place the questions here, and not after the theoretical chapters, as could have been done. The reader is free of course to go back to the questions after the theoretical summary. As seen below, the questions are followed by a discussion of their particular character and of the probability of defending my hypothetical point of departure, which could be beneficial to have in one’s luggage while entering the theoretical chapters. Some basic starting points are thus:
- What did the structural and institutional changes related to decentralization entail for the political party system?
- What characterized the political party system before the introduction of decentralization?
- Which characteristics of the party system have altered, disappeared or emerged since 1989? (Which of these can be related to decentralization?)
- How did the different political parties react to decentralization?
- Did the parties (traditional as well as new) take advantage of the opportunities presented through decentralization?
- How can we understand the processes that led to the “Big Power-Giveaway” and the opening of the political system and the State apparatus?
- To what extent did decentralization contribute to the collapse of Venezuelan bipartisan partyarchy?
- Under which circumstances did the traditional political elite agree on the need to decentralize in Venezuela? (Did they agree at all?)
- Did traditional party leaders try to resist these processes? In that case: How, and with what consequences?
- What happened within the political parties? (E.g., divisions, new strategies, internal restructuring, etc., as consequences of decentralization.)
- Are there any new political actors that clearly entered government arenas through decentralization? Who are they?
- Which surrounding conjunctural circumstances (economic and political) are important to consider in understanding the reform processes and the destiny of the reforms?
- Are there possibly differences between traditional parties and parties created after 1989?62

The research questions are manifestly of both causal and finalistic, as well as functional and genetic, character. It will be necessary to go deeper

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62 This last question might be almost too obvious or even naïve, but we cannot be certain about how each new party structure is set or develops, some parties having more decentralist and others having more top-down and hierarchical characteristics. Taking into consideration this initial circumstance at the birth of a party, it can be interesting to analyze whether some trends and behaviors of political actors can be traced to decentralization.
analytically in the study of the research topic (effects caused by decentralization on the political party system). As will be seen, the causal explanation factor. To say that A caused factor B (i.e., decentralization caused, e.g., political party fragmentation and decline of the previously dominating parties) will not be sufficient for understanding the complex processes in this evolution (even if it contains great parts of the probable actual facts). With a more finalistic approach, the question of the purpose of the action X (starting from X = decentralization reform) can contribute, for example, through an analysis of the objectives of the COPRE reform in relation to the parties, and the degree to which these aspirations were fulfilled or not. Functionally, and indirectly related to the causal and finalistic explanatory approaches, one might reflect on the function of X. Likewise, and of great value in the present study, a genetic formulation is built into the questions launched above. Namely, how to understand what led to X (X = decentralization reform), not only within the party system and the individual parties, but also in surrounding factors (e.g., of social and economic character).\footnote{Lindblad, 1981: 98-103.}

Returning to the causal type of explanation, I will argue that decentralization caused changes in the party system. But considering the emergence of the political movement around Hugo Chávez since 1998, it becomes clear that one causal hypothesis alone is not enough to comprehend the relationship between decentralization and changes in the party system. Considering the contradictory fact (i.e., for the hypothesis of this study) that two centralist presidents have been elected during the period (Rafael Caldera in 1993 and Hugo Chávez in 1998 and 2000). An interesting challenge is to examine the possible links between the decentralization process as well as relevant transformations of the party system and the coup attempt in February 1992.

In social sciences the risks of perceiving spurious relations are frequently latent, and therefore the necessity of a more dialectical analysis and mixed theoretical approach is even more important. Spurious connections might easily emerge, for example, with a factor X, say popular discontent and/or economic crisis, which triggers reforms, for example, decentralization. Therefore it becomes even more important to carefully reconsider the contextual developments with a mixed and dialectical theoretical approach.

\footnote{Lindblad, 1981: 98-103.}
It is not an easy task to show direct “proofs” confirming the decisive impact of decentralization on the party system structure. In other words, how to reach the conclusion that decentralization was the main explanatory factor for the breakdown of the traditional AD-COPEI dominated party system? It will be possible to measure or evaluate the hypothesis that decentralization undermined partyarchy by reviewing electoral results, for example, by comparing the numbers of governorships, mayoralties, and parliamentary seats obtained by different political parties between the elections. In the same context, the perceptions of actors involved in the decentralization process will be of value in the analysis.  

Now, is it possible to argue for the probability of my hypothesis, that is, that decentralization contributed to profound changes in the party system? I hold that this is the case. At the same time, however, I also wish to emphasize and admit that modern societies are more complex than that. One process, reform, social movement or institution can seldom develop or act alone, without affecting others. Neither can one process live its own independent life. Rather, as previously quoted from Dahl in the section on delimitations, each process, reform, organization or the like, is affected and influenced by other societal processes, behavior and action by competitive actors and further surrounding factors. Therefore, a more dialectical method will be needed in order to see more clearly if, and in that case, how, one process or reform led to transformations or ruptures, in this case in the Venezuelan political party system. The dialectical method will also serve to exclude other less relevant factors with regard to the explication of the transformations of interest in the study, that is, the party system changes related to the decentralization process. During the same period, the civic-military relationships have undergone changes, above all related to the movement around Hugo Chávez. Since Chávez came to power, the attitudes and roles of private mass media have undergone changes, and increasingly (and even systematically) they have been used for political purposes.

64 Of course, one might speculate whether the party system would have changed that much under conditions of continued economic prosperity, but in this study I will draw an analytical and practical delimitation based on the observable historical transformations.

65 Compared with the press in other Latin American countries, Venezuela has had a relatively open and liberal tradition since the 1980’s. Nevertheless, the power of media in the political context is and has been strong in building public opinion, and as one analyst stated: “Venezuelan media is like a particular and powerful sort of representative democracy within the political system” (Villarroel, interview, Stockholm, 16 March 2003).
Academics and politicians (frequently one and the same) have used the press as a political platform, opposition as well as government-related.

Likewise, decentralization has partly coincided with neo-liberalization, with privatization of institutions and enterprises. In addition, privatization of State institutions is also often an ingredient in the decentralization process, something that critics such as Chávez reject as being savage neo-liberalism. For these and other reasons, a single closed theoretical and methodological approach is simply not enough for the analytical study of the relationships between decentralization and changes in the political party system. Since individual behavior of party leaders is one crucial aspect in the study, further arguments for a mixed, dialectic approach are relevant to consider. Theories are indeed important as a study support, but they are never meant to be more important than the concerned human beings of the study to whom the theories are applied.

Theories make fine servants but poor masters. To meet, approach and care about living human beings is always more important than defending theoretical structures.66

PARTY SYSTEMS AND POLITICAL OPPORTUNITIES

In encompassing the theoretical-methodological approach, it will be necessary to broaden the view based on actor and rational choice to take a process-structural approach into consideration as well. The political opportunity structures approach does in fact embrace such a combination of approaches. This analytical school takes in not only structures (as the mere name of the concept indicates) but also actors’ possibilities for action and behavior, and the processes that emerge (or become visible), for example, through changes in structures and/or actors’ behavior. Traditionally, the rationalist analytical approach has frequently dominated studies on electoral political contention, for instance. In practice, the rationalist researchers often focus on individuals or collectives as if they were decision-makers and had a crucial stake in the action.\textsuperscript{67} Structures, in the context of political opportunities, refer to political regime structures rather than the economic and class-based structures that are emphasized in Marxist theoretical traditions. This combination of approaches can be carried through dialectically throughout the analysis.

A great number of political scientists and sociologists use what is sometimes called an “explanation level” with a primary focus on the actors and a combination of actors-structures. Here, particular attention is given to the actors and their decisions, actions and relations. Likewise, as Swedish political scientist Lennart Lundquist argues, a primary endeavor is to relate and connect the levels of actor and structure. The relations of influence between actors and structure might appear, then, in studies on institutions, for instance.\textsuperscript{68} There is a tension between the actor and structure approaches (e.g., political actors mobilizing within a given structure) that often is hard to determine. I aim to find the relationships between the two and also to interpret the results in the form of the processes that emerge.

In practical terms, it is necessary in the present study first to identify the political territory (or field of contention) and the principal actors, namely, the political party system and the main parties and individual party leaders. A political party system existed in Venezuela, In practical terms, it is

\textsuperscript{67} McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001: 21.

\textsuperscript{68} Lundquist, 1993: 34-36.
necessary in the present study first to identify the political territory (or field of contention) and the principal actors, namely, the political party system and the main parties and individual party leaders. A party system existed in Venezuela, with certain characteristics as to party and politician behavior, institutional delimitation, and so on, for decades before the introduction of the decentralization reforms in 1989. The political process approach mainly focuses on and proceeds from an existing regime, but since the present study also considers aspects more concerned with structure and actors’ rational choice, it will therefore be necessary to broaden the approach.

Throughout the study, the chapters, and each of the bigger “theoretical blocs,” will relate to each other. I aim to maintain awareness of the distinct “blocs” or “bodies” of the work. That is, to structure the focus of each section with both forthcoming and previous “bodies” in mind, for example, with direct references to decentralization in the chapter on party systems and political opportunities, and vice-versa. Likewise, to construct fairly smooth crossings between, for example, the theoretical chapter on decentralization and the first empirical chapter.

**Theories of Social Movements and Political Processes**

Four dominant theoretical schools have developed in social movement studies, namely: collective behavior, political processes, resource mobilization and new social movement theories. For Sidney Tarrow, the modern theoretical debate on social movements traces its roots to Marxist and Neo-Marxist views on possibilities for and obstacles to collective action. As he summarizes it, Marx presented the basic cleavages of capitalist society with its creation of a mobilization potential. Lenin wrote on the need to structure movement organizations and to prevent their spreading only as tiny corporate claims, whereas Antonio Gramsci emphasized the necessity to strengthen the cultural foundation under the movement in broad consensus with the goals of the political party.

The Neo-Marxist approach has been criticized by Craig Jenkins among others, who argues that the Neo-Marxist perspectives are not enough, since they fail to recognize the independence of political processes and institutions. For the Neo-Marxists, the State is considered as a functional

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69 Della Porta & Diani, 1999: 3-4. See also McCarthy & Zald, 1977.
part of the economic system, rather than as a possible playground (or arena) for societal and political actors’ competition [sic!].\textsuperscript{71} Neo-Marxists would not agree with that position, and would classify the criticisms as a straw-man argument to misrepresent the position (as is the case here). At the same time, it has become more and more difficult to separate the Neo-Marxist and liberal-pluralist schools, with former Neo-Marxists leaving their previous ideological standpoints. In any event, this theoretical division will not be thoroughly reviewed in this work.

In a comparison between resource mobilization and new social movement theories, the first is concerned with understanding how movements mobilize, whereas the second school is more concerned with why movements mobilize. As argued by della Porta and Diani, for example, the mobilization possibilities of groups/collectives/organizations depend either on material resources (time, money, concrete advantages, etc.) or on non-material resources (moral values, belief, friendship, etc.) that are available to the group.\textsuperscript{72} The first sphere, based on material resources, seems to indicate more the group’s initial strategy base and economic position, while the non-material resources include values more related to identity and group autonomy. Sociologists John McCarthy and Meyer Zald present some basic characteristics in the definition of the resource mobilization approach. Regarding the relationship of social movements to society at large, they argue that the existing society provides the infrastructure for the movement. The movements thus take into consideration the fundamental circumstances regarding resource availability and societal structures.\textsuperscript{73} New social movement theorists generally mention autonomy and identity as goals that are sufficient in themselves for social movements to achieve to be

\textsuperscript{71} Jenkins, 1994: 30.

\textsuperscript{72} Della Porta & Diani, 1999:8-9 and Verba et al, (1995) who state that “time, money and skills” are the decisive resources for citizens when it comes to the probability level of success in political participation.

\textsuperscript{73} McCarthy & Zald, 1977. See, e.g. pp. 1216-1217, 1236-1237. Although the article was written before the concept of “New Social Movement” was rooted among theorists, and though the authors use other concepts for presenting their theoretical findings, the article does indeed present ideas that would evolve into what would be classified as new social movement theories. The concept of “new social movements” was coined by Italian sociologist Alberto Melucci in 1981. Melucci himself later regretted that the concept took such firm root among academics, since it was meant to function more temporarily, and in a longer time perspective it can be mis-leading. He suggested the epithet “new” rather to differentiate the more recent wave of social movements from the old traditional ones, and the labor movement in particular (Melucci, 1989).
considered successful.\textsuperscript{74} Resource mobilization theorists, on the other hand, hold that movements are created by other demands. Through these other demands, the identity of the movement is formed, according to the resource mobilization school. This second statement is forcefully criticized by the new social movement theorists, who claim that it is not possible to form a movement identity that way. For them, identity-building needs an autonomous platform, whereas the resource mobilization theorists seem to argue that perfectly autonomous platforms do not exist. These differences between new social movement and resource mobilization theorists might make the practical research work of the analyst more arduous, that is, if loyalty to the theoretical school is to have highest priority (something I disagree with). Possibilities of combining the distinct (sub-) schools do exist, however, and have been developed by several social movement theorists. In recent social movement debates, an endeavor to create a unified, common social movement theory incorporating the resource mobilization theories has been appearing.

**Political Movements**

[If social movements are defined as] organized, collective efforts to achieve social change that use noninstitutionalized tactics at least part of the time. Political movements (…) are social movements directed at formal government institutions.\textsuperscript{75}

Social movement theorists generally agree that movements share two common characteristics. Firstly, they demand and exert pressure for social and political changes, and secondly, they operate outside the established political institutions.\textsuperscript{76} On the other hand, a good number of “new” social movements develop into a political party formation; in Europe this is most evident in the case of the Green or environmental parties with background as movements. Peter Mair suggests that the very success of the movements often depends on the partidization of the organization.\textsuperscript{77} This meeting between movements and parties can often also be mutual, that is, in a more

\textsuperscript{74} Lembke, 2003 (draft), based on Jon Shefter and his argument concerning the movement itself as the objective.

\textsuperscript{75} Burstein et al, 1995: 278. The question of what should be considered “institutionalized” or “noninstitutionalized” tactics depends on the interpretation of the analyst, and at times on theoretical perspective.


\textsuperscript{77} Mair, 1997: 10.
corporatist fashion, when movements are incorporated into already-existing political parties, which then put the objectives of the movement on the agenda (and/or include them to attract voters).

The difference and boundary between what should be classified as a social vis-à-vis a political movement is not easily drawn. Diarmuid Maguire demonstrates that the relationships between movements and parties (and their interactions) are most prevalent when the party or parties are in opposition, and thus more dependent on allies for electoral purposes. 78 Furthermore, Colombian political scientist Orlando Fals Borda makes an important contribution in presenting analytical tools for the study of social and political movements, and changes in political and party systems. As he describes it, local (and regional) movements and their leaders have confronted a situation where they feel forced to amplify their original perspectives to be able to achieve political changes.

Therefore, the movements shifted from the micro to the macro level and from protest to proposal. (…) In many areas, the loss of legitimacy by parties and governments has created a power gap, which the movements, in their expansive evolution, have been filling locally and regionally in their own way. Today, through networks and other mechanisms of regional and national coordination, many of the movements are beginning to propose or demand programmatic or structural changes for society at large. (…) By making the leap from the micro to the macro and by entering onto the plane of general proposals and objectives without losing their identity, integrity, leadership, and autonomy as movements, the most advanced of these are becoming (or, in several places, have already become) major political alternatives.79

Regarding the question of classification as movement or party and the possibility of including alternative political parties in this theoretical approach, Fals Borda admits that there are various movements that are technically registered as parties. “It is more than a question of being called a party or a movement.” He further asserts that many of today’s movements have put pressure for internal and structural changes on the existing parties, and the critical attitude towards parties in general also fills the purpose of demystifying the parties. The movements can thus function and develop as political alternatives that can contribute to new models of doing politics, and

78 Maguire, 1995: 199.
the more advanced movements can challenge the established parties and create pressure for changes.\textsuperscript{80}

Again, social (and political) movements are seldom easy to define; rather, they could be described as complex actors and composed of a series of differing organizations with distinct types of strategies, which is, as I see it, a fairly normal description of a modern political party. At the same time, it has been generally observed that every social or political movement tries to take advantage of the gains made by other movements. Moreover, the movements normally seek allies in political parties and State agencies, and the parties often try in parallel to incorporate the movement into the party, or to include its topics and demands on the political agenda.\textsuperscript{81} In the course of these processes of approaching the State or developing a political agenda, the social (or political) movement is institutionalized. That is, it enters the field of “conventional politics” or achieves a degree of representation.

In short, institutionalization occurs at the ‘meso-level’ of collective action and this is the key to understanding the phenomenon. (…) This meso[-]level includes a kaleidoscope of ‘mesostructural factors’ like pre-existing organizations, party constellations, rules and policies, public opinion, and even factions internal to the movement itself.\textsuperscript{82}

In all, these developments can cause a snowball effect, with the entry of more and more movements into the political sphere. British political scientist Joe Foweraker emphasizes that all social movements have to be defined to a certain degree by their respective political agendas or their ambitions to acquire influence on political and institutional changes.

**Party Systems and Their Transformations**

Party systems can undergo dramatic changes. The organizational characteristics of parties, their competitive position, the behavior of voters, the characteristics of party leadership, and the programmatic axes that separate and bind parties can change relatively quickly, but they do not change often.\textsuperscript{83}

\textsuperscript{80} Ibid.: 306.

\textsuperscript{81} Della Porta & Diani, 1999: 231. Compare with previous quotes of Fals Borda.

\textsuperscript{82} Foweraker, 1995: 69-70.

\textsuperscript{83} Petrovic & Brown, 1999: 11.
The political parties are normally supposed to serve as channels of expression between the political decision-makers and the citizens. To be able to satisfy popular demands, the parties strive to capture the decision-making power within the existing political system. The political system as a whole can be described as the total of all the political arrangements of a society, including all factors that have influence on collective decisions, taking broadly into consideration all relevant political and societal processes and actors, such as government, State institutions, parties, voters and social movements. Individual as well as group actors can of course act (or play) in various different arenas within the political system at the same time. At the same time, an actor, a political party, for example, can also be an arena for other actors, such as social organizations or individuals.

Basically, a difference is made between no-party, one-party, two-party, and multi-party systems. In the Western world, a debate on the differences, virtues, advantages and disadvantages of two-party versus multi-party systems has raged for years, especially in English-speaking nations. One argument for a two-party system is that it places a smaller burden on the voter due to the simple option of only two alternative choices. At the same time, though, this system drastically reduces the voters’ freedom of choice. Douglas Rae argued in 1971 that a two-party system exists when two parties together capture above 90 percent of the votes, and when none of them obtains 70 percent of the electoral support.

In any event, pure two-party systems, that is, systems having two (and only two) parties with parliamentary representation, are extremely rare. Party system researchers frequently disregard parties without parliamentary seats when calculating the relative strength and size of political parties (the fragmentation, which will be discussed below). For forty years Venezuela has been an official two-party system (or two-and-a-half-party system, as


85 No-party systems still exist in some Arab and Caribbean countries. One-party systems have been a common feature of many Third World countries (including dictatorial regimes). In Latin America, the PRI party (Partido Revolucionario Institucional) in Mexico has functioned as a political system rather than as a party, i.e., with total control over State institutions for seventy-one years until the elections of 2000.


some scholars argue, based on the small percentage of votes that parties other than AD and COPEI captured between 1958 and 1988). Giovanni Sartori presents three fundamental traits of two-party systems:

1) Two political parties manage over time to outdistance all other parties, so that,
2) Each of them is in a position to compete for an absolute majority of seats, implying the reasonable expectation of alternation in power between the two, and
3) When in government, each of them governs alone. 89

Ecuadorean-Venezuelan political scientist Alfredo Ramos Jiménez agrees with Sartori and clarifies that the bipartisan system does not exclude the possibility of dominant parties using the support of or forming alliances with other parties when necessary. 90 Within comparative politics research, there are scholars who argue that political pact making can prove to be favorable for democratic stability. In combination with a weak presidency, a pacted democracy could be even more positive, since the pact making prevents the negative patterns of the “winner-takes-all” system. 91 There are further interesting aspects on party systems and levels of democracy and democratisation. Coppedge demonstrates that political party systems have impacts on the quality of democracy and citizen representation. But it is not the number of parties alone that is decisive. It is likewise a question of which parties they are and whether they differ substantially from each other. Coppedge concludes that the greater the number of parties, the more likely it is that all voting citizens (or groups of voters) are truly represented by at least one party. 92

The concrete differences between two-party and multi-party systems are most relevant to consider in the present study. The pluralization of the Venezuelan party system coincided with the decentralization reforms, that is, when the “doors” were opened to the State and the political arenas, as will be further described in the section on political opportunity structures. With a centralized two-party political system, the voters are likely to consider voting outside the dominating two parties a waste (wasted-vote

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91 Philip, 2000: 3.
scenario). But with a decentralized system, votes for smaller parties might be of greater value, with the possibility of gaining political representation at the municipal or regional state levels.

Several analysts hold that the constitution of a party system can be a decisive condition for a decentralization process. Penfold-Becerra, for instance, argues that highly centralized party systems have decisively negative implications for the outcomes of a decentralization reform. In such systems, regional autonomy is likely limited, since the power dispersion originating in decentralization undermines the ability of party leaders to exercise control. These leaders aim at forcing the legislative body to design rules that make it difficult for the regional political leaders to gain control of services. If we consider this relationship (between party system and decentralization) through electoral lenses, a pattern might emerge, since the electoral processes at the regional state level decide both the composition of the legislative body at the national level and the popular preferences for regional political leaders (governors). In a strong presidential system (e.g., in Venezuela), however, the executive frequently overrides the legislative, for example, through launching laws by decree.

Electoral preferences at the regional level are likely to be reflected in the national parliament, particularly if the regional and national elections are close to each other in time. For this reason, I have aimed to show the distribution of parliamentary seats at the national level, since they are the results of preferences in the regional states. The national parliamentary deputies are elected by region and thus represent their respective regional states at the national level (e.g., in regional commissions).

In the chapters that follow I will develop a line of arguments pointing to the possibility of party system transformations as the result of the struggle of new local and regional political leaderships within a decentralization scheme. The relationships between party systems and decentralization are complex indeed. I have not aimed to turn my purpose totally around through Penfold-Becerra’s argument above. Aspects of a strong presidentialism can (without constituting main variables of the study) contribute to the analysis of particular cases. As mentioned earlier, the presidents of Venezuela have

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played protagonistic roles in the decentralization process, as will be seen in the forthcoming empirical chapters.

Further distinctions in party systems are differences in policies normally detected between aligned and coalition-based party systems. Highly aligned systems tend to present less variety on issues and less pronounced intra-party differences. Coalition parties, on the other hand, frequently present fewer (or no) groups with strongly classifiable preferences. As Sartori put it already in 1966:

While too much programmatic clarity can damage coalition parties, the major threat to the unity of aligned parties is too little issue differentiation.\(^{94}\)

Party systems, and changes in the systems, have consequences for all political actors, as well as internal consequences for party structure and representation. Entering into the theories of political opportunity structures (more thoroughly presented in due course), an illustrative figure shows the factors that can cause inter- and intra-party transformations presented by Frank Wilson. This model also contributes to an understanding of the development and changes of the political party system as a whole via changes in the individual parties:

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\(^{94}\) In Petrocik & Brown, 1999: 17.
In the square of Political Party (transformation), leaders and reformers are positioned in the frontline vis-à-vis the surrounding environment and influential factors. The graphic indicates the concentration of power in the main leading personalities of the parties, most relevant to consider in the present study. In a classic work of the 1950’s, Maurice Duverger emphasizes that one of the most powerful trademarks of the political parties since the beginning of the 20th century has been the increased power of the leading authorities in the parties. Likewise, he reveals a tendency towards personalization of the power within the party, that is, the development of a personalized form of authority. With reference to the mass parties of the U.S.A. and some Western European countries, a further characteristic is the party discipline of the electorate (and the elected), at times approaching quasi-dictatorial patterns (like some North American “big bosses”), illustrated with the famous slogan: “Vote as you are told.”

95 Wilson, 1994: 263-265.
96 Duverger, 2002 [1951]: 198-199.
We return now to the two ways of measuring party system transformation, volatility and fragmentation. The volatility index, that is, the degree of sudden party system change between elections, can be calculated through the sum of the absolute values of shares won by all parties from one election to another, then halved for the adjustment of double-counting. Normally, the volatility is calculated on consecutive elections, but as Coppedge demonstrates, it could function for the analysis of any pair of elections.\(^{97}\) The volatility index is relatively easy to handle when the party system has few actors and hardly any alliances (as in Venezuela until 1988). One way of resolving this problem is to count the volatility by blocs, for instance, comparing groups of right-wing/left-wing parties.\(^{98}\)

Fragmentation too can be calculated on the basis of blocs (or alliances). Both the fragmentation and the volatility index are analytical tools that can provide indicators of party system transformations. In order to facilitate the calculation of party system fragmentation, Sartori proposes a model in which only parties that obtain parliamentary seats are included.\(^{99}\) However, Lijphart stresses that Sartori’s model does indeed function for distinguishing between nationally significant parties and smaller ones with limited influence, but at the same time the model has its defects in the calculation of the number of parties in a party system. Lijphart refers to studies by Jean Blondel as a mode of resolving that problem and being able to cover both the number of parties and their relative size.\(^{100}\) Blondel demonstrates the classification system through an example with four categories.

\(^{97}\) Coppedge, 2001 a: 201; Molina, 2000. See also Pedersen, 1979, for the original calculation of the index.

\(^{98}\) Coppedge, 1997. A simple example could be: Two parties (or blocs) present the following shares of votes in two elections: 65-35 and 55-45. Then the volatility of the period would be: \(65–55/2=5\).

\(^{99}\) In Lijphart, 1999: 65.

\(^{100}\) The measure model of effective number of parties was first presented in Laakso & Taagepera, 1979: 3-27.
Classification of party systems based on the numbers and relative sizes of political parties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party System</th>
<th>Hypothetical examples of seat shares</th>
<th>Effective number of parties</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Two-party system</td>
<td>55 – 45</td>
<td>2.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Two-and-a-half party system</td>
<td>45 – 40 – 15</td>
<td>2.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multi-party system with a dominant party</td>
<td>45 – 20 – 15 – 10 – 10</td>
<td>3.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Since this thesis deals with the rupture of the traditional hegemonic two-party system in Venezuela in the context of decentralization, a few words are needed about conditions under which party systems tend to collapse. Henry Dietz and David Myers present a three-part model on the probabilities of party system collapse or weakening.

1) Some kind of acute and long-lived crisis (e.g., economic or social),
2) The parties of the system are perceived as incapable of confronting the crisis, and:
3) An alternative party or leader is considered to be attractive as an option.

The authors suggest that a collapse of a party system is most likely when a combination of these factors occurs. These ideas do not conflict with the implications of a decentralization reform for a party system, I argue, since the first two factors can function as a pressure for reform. Further, once decentralization has been introduced, local and regional leaders can be perceived as alternatives to the previously dominant party/party.

102 Dietz & Myers, 2003 a: 3.
This section of the study began with a quotation stating that party systems can change dramatically, but not very often. In studies of European party systems, the classic works from the 1960’s by Stein Rokkan and Seymour Lipset launched the theories of the “freezing of the party systems.” The studies revealed that in Western European political systems, the parties that emerged in the 1920’s (with the social cleavages of that time as the basis of party concentration) still dominated politics in the 1960’s. Decades later, the “freezing hypothesis” continues to be debated. It has not often been used to analyze the Latin American democracies, though. One reason might be that many of the nations first became democratized in the 1980’s, but Venezuela (as well as Mexico) could well fit the model of a frozen party system, which will be asserted in due course.

**The Political Society**

Through the electoral and parliamentary processes, political parties channel social interests and express popular demands. In accomplishing these tasks, political parties normally [...] serve a broad aggregating function, integrating the multitude of conflicting demands from society into workable packages.

When studying transformations of party systems, it is relevant to take into consideration the societal, political and institutional framework in the context of the research topic, which also becomes decisive in the studies of decentralization reforms. Many scholars, Joel Migdal for instance, emphasize the importance of a balanced State-in-society approach, instead of hanging on to the classical State-centered or society-centered theories. It is just as much a question here of society’s influence on the State as of how the State affects society. Gordon White makes a further distinction in the discussions of State-society relations, adding a political sphere between the State and civil society. The State here refers to the “apparatus of administrative, judicial, legislative and military organizations,” while the political society includes a number of mediating institutions and actors between civil society and the State. These political actors can play varying roles, like the political parties that sometimes have the integrative capability

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103 In Mair, 2001: 27.
104 Hadenius, 2001 a: 32. See also Sartori, 1976.
to bring together large groups of civil society into broad coalitions. At the same time, they might also act to increase tensions between particular groups of civil society. As White argues, they can act both to strengthen and to weaken groups in civil society.  

Similarly, though, he admits that civil society as a whole could be viewed simply as one type of the political relationship between society and the State. In *Political Society in Developing Countries*, political scientist A.H. Somjee illustrates that political society as a concept can be used as an analytical tool in studies of the operative relationships between the citizens and the (relatively) newly established institutions in developing countries. Many researchers (like White) place the political parties in the sphere of political society, between civil society and the State. But political parties can theoretically also be defined as organizations of civil society, depending on various factors such as their size and position related to government or opposition.

The political society, as seen in the model above, penetrates both civil society and the State. In the latter, political organizations can take part and be involved in judicial, legislative, administrative and executive institutions.

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107 Ibid.: 378.
108 Somjee, 1984: 3-4.
109 The stars in the Civil Society field represent organizations, which can act alone and/or collaborate with other organizations and institutions. Graphic developed in collaboration with political scientist Magnus Lembke, Institute of Latin American Studies, Stockholm University, 2000-2002.
The act of voting is naturally considered as unique among the possible political acts for the citizens. The A arrow in the model above illustrates “representative democracy,” the “normal” way of the electoral process, where citizens “normally” participate through the political parties with their votes for the candidacy of their political representatives. To quote the classic Italian Gramscian theorist Norberto Bobbio: “Generally the expression ‘representative democracy’ means that collective deliberations, i.e. deliberations which concern the whole community, are taken not directly by its members, but by people elected for this purpose.”\textsuperscript{110} The uniqueness of the act of voting lies in the fact that voting is for each individual a legally limited way to participate in politics, in comparison to other types of political activity, where the actors are free to multiply the participatory input.

Neo-Marxists, including Antonio Gramsci, criticize the pluralist intentions to make a clear distinction between civil society and the State. For Gramsci, “The general notion of State includes elements that need to be referred beyond the notion of civil society (in order to be able to say that State = political society + civil society, in other words a hegemony protected by the armature of coercion).”\textsuperscript{111} For Norberto Bobbio, the evolution of modern societies is better understood as the development of a new kind of democracy, which raises a need within the social sciences to change focus. From having concentrated on the efforts of democratizing the State and its institutions, the time had come to start focusing on the democratization of society. The political sphere is manifestly part of a much broader and deeper sphere, that of society as a whole. In this situation, Bobbio holds, there are no political decisions that are not determined or conditioned by what happens in civil society.\textsuperscript{112}

The liberal-pluralist approach holds that the existence and activities of the political parties have to be considered as crucial in a democratic system and in the State-society relationships. The parties shape the functioning of democratic societies as the main agents of political representation and virtually the only actors in democratic politics with access to elected positions.\textsuperscript{113} Traditionally, social movements in Latin America have had

\textsuperscript{110} Bobbio, 1987: 45.
\textsuperscript{111} Quoted in Macdonald, 1997: 19.
\textsuperscript{112} Bobbio, 1987: 55.
\textsuperscript{113} Mainwaring & Scully, 1995: 2-3.
little room to act by themselves. They have functioned rather as a support for
the political parties. As for the relationship between the State, parties and
social movements, the parties are supposed to link these groups to the State.
Peter Mair classifies certain political parties as brokers (catch-all parties)
between the State and civil society. But then the civil society does not
penetrate the party system; this can be compared with the case of a situation
with mass-parties, which normally do allow some entrance of civil society
(or incorporate it) into the political sphere.

Political Opportunity Structures

The greater the degree of decentralization, the greater is the degree of formal access.
Decentralization implies multiple points of access.

When analyzing the success of organized social groups (including political
parties), the political environment is of great importance. The concept of
political opportunity structures can help in the definition of the important
surrounding factors around the organized group. Sidney Tarrow defines the
concept as “consistent – but not necessarily formal or permanent –
dimensions of the political environment that provide incentives for people to
undertake collective action by affecting their expectations for success or
failure.” This concept can be used to analyze the official status for all
kinds of citizen organizations. Generally, the citizen organizations are
influenced by:

1) The State structure,
2) The legal framework,
3) The openness (or closure) of the political system, and
4) The competition between political actors,

Tarrow adds five additional decisive factors for the model, namely:

114 Touraine, 1989: 162.
115 Mair: 1997: 98-103, 110-111. Mair demonstrates that in several European cases, mass
parties as representatives have been almost evident properties of civil society. In Latin
America the opposite situation has emerged in several countries (e.g., Venezuela and the
relations between AD and national unionism).
117 Tarrow, 1994: 85.
5) The stability (or fragility/absence) of political alignments,
6) The presence (or absence) of political allies,
7) Possible divisions within the elite(s),
8) The tolerance level towards protests, and,
9) The policy-making innovations by the government itself.\textsuperscript{119}

The structure of the State refers to the type of State constitution, the process of central administration, State centralization/decentralization and the degree of unity and/or federative character. The State structure of a nation can change, for example, through a decentralization process. The legal framework sets up the juridical limits and possibilities of the organizations; that is, it prevents or stimulates the existence and evolution of certain citizen organizations, for example, through financing of the organization’s activities. Changes in the laws can affect the organizations.

The openness of the political system has to do with its accessibility to the political process. Organizations might thus get access to all parts of the political decision-making, depending on the openness of the political system. If they are able to enter the political arena, it becomes possible for the organizations to place their own desired items on the political agenda. The State’s degree of openness, if it increases, can have a vitalizing effect on the actors. That is, with central State control from above (e.g., from Caracas, in the case of Venezuela), there are fewer gates (or “doors”) to hold into the State, but with a decentralized system these gates to the State are open. In all, this signifies that if the State and/or the governing party actors control the nomination of political leaders on all spatial levels from the center, then they are able to exclude certain groups from the political process. Peter Mair emphasizes these aspects of openness/closure of the political system and competition between actors as decisive in the midst of party system transformations, and further, that with such a focus it is possible to view party system change as much more than just an electoral change.\textsuperscript{120} As Guillermo O’Donnell argues, institutions can both exclude and incorporate. Institutions determine which agents (or actors) are accepted for participation in decision-making and implementation processes. These criteria fit some

\textsuperscript{119} In Foweraker, 1995: 71.
\textsuperscript{120} Mair, 1997: 214-215.
agents, and might lead other agents to reshape themselves, and are thus necessarily selective.\textsuperscript{121}

The electoral system (and its possible changes) also has implications for accessibility and the possibilities for previously excluded actors to reach political representation. Generally, political access is easier in proportional systems, since these are more inclusive.\textsuperscript{122} In this dissertation, the electoral reforms in Venezuela are seen to be embedded to a high degree in the decentralization reforms. An electoral system with proportional representation can stimulate political party pluralization (and fragmentation). Generally, local government arenas are considered to have a stimulating effect on the collective will among the citizens to cooperate with the State and with each other. \textit{Thus, political decentralization matters.}

The fourth condition, on competition between political actors and the number of political competitors, has implications for the opportunities of each organization, something that is most valid in the context of decentralization and the possibility for alternative political movements to act on the local and regional levels. Nonetheless, one could criticize this model of the factors that affect the possibilities of the organizations to mobilize. For example, general currents of ideas and discourses can also imply limitations and influence for the organizations in these processes. At the same time, the interpretation of what the State and the political system are, also has theoretical consequences. Tarrow confesses that a problem with the political opportunity structure model and its analytical application possibilities lies in the fact that it is much more “a cluster of variables” than a single variable, which might diverge significantly in comparisons between studies of democratic and authoritarian regimes.\textsuperscript{123} Another danger is that sometimes theories of the State might survey the space of collective action from too high above, so that crucial processes and internal variations are not visible.\textsuperscript{124}

Regarding the additional decisive factors presented by Tarrow, there is a fundamental difference between his and Kriesi’s use of the political

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{121} O’Donnell, 1994: 57; Grindle, 1996: 11-12.
\item \textsuperscript{122} Hadenius, 2001 a: 91.
\item \textsuperscript{123} In Foweraker, 1995: 71.
\item \textsuperscript{124} Ibid.: 72-73.
\end{itemize}
opportunity structure approach. Whereas Tarrow aims to describe the emergence of social movements in a specific country, Kriesi is interested rather in the differences between countries in this context.\footnote{125 Tarrow, 1996; Kriesi, 1996.} Two of Tarrow’s conditions, the absence or presence of divisions within elites, and the possible allies of an opposition movement in established groups, are worth underlining. Internal party divisions and fragmentation, as well as the formation of alliances by political movements, will play a decisive role in the course of the present study. New alternative political actors can, for example, establish connections and gain supporters within the Church (e.g., a priest or a bishop), in business sectors, among intellectuals, academics, media personalities, and with political leaders in the establishment who are disillusioned with their party of origin. In a setting of economic crisis for the establishment, and if the alternative actor (the challenger) enjoys attention from media, it is more likely that the movement will grow further. The possible support of, for example, priests and intellectuals from the establishment then has great symbolic value (if they are respected by the citizens).

Nevertheless, maintaining the focus on the decisive points of political opportunities as presented by Kriesi and Tarrow, I would hold that a few of these fundamental conditions for political opportunities are practically the same. For instance, “competition between actors” and “divisions within elites.” as well as “State structure” and “legal framework.” overlap a great deal. Similarly, it might seem quite odd to posit the openness/closure of the political system as a decisive factor, since this state of affairs could be seen as the result of what the other factors together generate.\footnote{126 I am grateful to comments from Fredrik Uggla on these points.}

However, the opportunity structure encompasses not only changes in opportunity but also stable aspects that condition movement formation and strategy. Differences in the State’s strength are decisive factors. Long-term changes in the State’s strength affect the opportunities of resource-poor groups.\footnote{127 Tarrow, 1994: 89-91.} The economic crisis in Latin America from the 1980’s naturally weakened the Nation States. This development contributed to additional political opportunities for opposition movements. Institutional changes are fundamental for the relative position of an organization and its ability to affect politics. As for the institutional aspects of the political opportunity
structures, economist and Nobel laureate Douglass North holds that the
direction of institutional change is shaped by the interaction between
institutions and organizations. The institutions provide the “rules of the
game” in which organizations act and compete. The organizations strive to
take advantage (and are created to take advantage) of the opportunities
within the existing institutional framework. Through this process, the
organizations contribute to the gradual change of the institutions.
“Institutional change shapes the way societies evolve over time and hence is
the key to understanding historical change.” 128 These changes in the
relationships between the State and society might not be so immediately
obvious. Rather, to follow the reasoning of Larry Diamond, these processes
involve adaptation, conflicts between interest groups (e.g., between elites
and the grass roots) and learning processes, which all in all take place under
constraining structural conditions. 129 As Gerardo Munck stresses when
discussing the changes Latin American nations had undergone during the
1980’s, “It is only by stepping back and providing a long-term view that we
will be able to start seeing with some clarity just what has been
changing.” 130

**Authorities and Challengers**

In theoretical studies based on political opportunities, Kriesi, Tarrow, della
Porta and Diani, and many others identify the main actors in these processes
as the “authorities” and the “challengers.” With an analytical starting point
in the challengers, political scientists Michael Foley and Bob Edwards hold
that the political setting is crucial for what role organized societal groups are
able to play and the expectations of outcome in the collective action of each

128 North, 1990: 3-16. North, in his definition of institution as a concept, is quite close to
that of neo-utilitarian John Rawls, who in 1971 defined institution as a “public system of
rules which defines offices and positions with their rights and duties, powers and
immunities, and the like. These rules specify certain forms of action as permissible, others as
forbidden; and they provide for certain penalties and defenses, and so on, when violations
occur. As examples of institutions, or more generally social practices, we may think of games
and rituals, trials and parliaments, markets and systems of property. An institution may be
thought of in two ways: first as an abstract object, that is, as a possible form of conduct
expressed by a system of rules; and second, as the realization in the thought and conduct of
certain persons at a certain time and place of the actions specified by these rules” (Rawls,


130 Munck, 1993: 493. See also Anckar, 1998: 30, for considerations of these aspects in party
systems.
In social movement theories, the political opportunity structure model is used, among other things, to analyze how a national political system handles the possible challengers of the system. Likewise, three broader sets of properties of the political system are distinguished:

A) Its formal institutional structure,
B) The informal procedures and dominating strategies towards challengers, and
C) The configuration of power for the authorities’ confrontation with challengers.

The existing political institutions of a society can function in practice to support some actors in and prevent others from gaining access to decision-making power and strategic resources (the inclusion/exclusion factor will be mentioned further in due course). With respect to the strategies of social and political movements in the context of political opportunities and access to the State and political power, Craig Jenkins and Bert Klandermans argue that the opportunities both “exist and are made.” Via political pressure and the creation of new identities and demands, the challenging movement can thus contribute to the formation of “new” opportunities.

Tarrow concludes that political parties (and other elite groups) are most likely to take advantage of political opportunities created by movements when a ruling system is fundamentally challenged by a higher number of social movements, and thus not by threats from one single movement (which is easier to suppress). That is, when the pressure from below (social and political movements) increases in strength to a level of generalized opportunities, then it is more likely to achieve a reformist outcome in the confrontation with the establishment. Again, the formation of alliances between movements and political parties creates further bases of pressure, as can be illustrated below (compare with previous figure on the Political Society and forthcoming on the Politics Model):

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134 Tarrow, 1996: 60-61.
The simple polity figure can be seen as a somewhat more detailed variant of my previous *Political Society* model. But importantly, in this *Polity Model* the possible alliances are more visible. In addition, a more exact frontier between outside actors and challengers is manifest. It is worth noting that McAdam, Tarrow and Tilly include other governments (e.g., neighboring countries) among outside actors, that is, the international pressure factor behind a reform or a political decision-maker. Furthermore, the authors emphasize that social processes include both sequences and combinations of causal mechanisms, illustrating the arduousness of tracing the circumstantial factors that contribute to a certain development or transformation. The explanation of contentious politics requires identification of recurrent causal mechanisms and sequences, initiating from distinct initial conditions, which create varying large-scale impacts. From this perspective, the usability of a mixed theoretical-methodological dialectical approach in studies of political transformations emerges in a new light, as may also be observed in the politics model (presented in a forthcoming section) and the decisive factors in political opportunity structures.

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135 McAdam, Tarrow & Tilly, 2001: 10-15.
Repression and Facilitation

Where the State is unresponsive, its institutions are undemocratic, or its democracy is ill designed to recognize and respond to citizen demands, the character of collective action will be decidedly different than under a strong and democratic system.137

Nevertheless, decentralization per se does not always work in favor of social and alternative political movements. Following the argument of della Porta and Diani (and as will also be argued in this study on Venezuela), the dispersal of political power increases access for all political actors, including possible counter-movements. In addition, situations can develop in which allies of a certain movement form the national government and carry through policies favorable to that movement. But these politics can be obstructed at decentralized levels of government (dominated, e.g., by opposition parties) or also by other State institutions, such as the courts.138

In my interpretation, the political opportunity structures theories fall under the studies of party system transformations, particularly if we reconsider the micro to macro transitions of movements and the focus on alternative political actors challenging the political authorities. As discussed above, decentralization can favor alternative political actors at the local and regional levels, but not necessarily, nor per automatique. It might happen that a closed local or regional elite monopolizes the points of issue, with fragmentation of civil and political society as a result. In the 1970’s, Charles Tilly developed the ideas of collective action in the context of political opportunity structures (clearly inspired by the ideas of Mancur Olsen). He also presents some basic schematic theoretical models of the possible action processes of interest groups.

Mobilization and action processes of interest groups:

137 Foley & Edwards, 1996: 48 (capitalization of “State” by me).
Notwithstanding, this model shows only the possible process of action of an interest group and does not take into consideration the existence of possible resistance from authorities to the “new” political challengers. It can be assumed that during these processes in search of power, the movement/organization encounters bureaucratic and/or even violent resistance from the authorities. Tilly emphasizes that collective action costs something, and in these struggles the movement might lose sometimes and win other times. At times the movement might use strategic coalitions with other actors. Both costs and benefits are uncertain for the movement in these processes, since, as Tilly continues, “(a) contenders have imperfect information about the current state of the polity; (b) all parties engage in strategic interaction.” The schematic model below presents the very moment of collective action.\footnote{Tilly, 1978: 98-99.}

**Collective action and power/repression**

Some clarification of the aspects of repression is necessary here. The definition used by Tilly reads: "Repression is any action by another group which raises the contender’s cost of collective action. An action, which lowers the group’s cost of collective action, is a form of facilitation. (We call repression or facilitation political if the other party is a government)."\footnote{Ibid.: 100.}

The degree of centralization-decentralization of the State structure decides which institutions are to be considered an “accessible” government. Governorships and mayoralities that are controlled from the center are therefore not prime targets for alternative movements in a winner-takes-all system (my comments). In this continuum between political repression and facilitation in the (more or less contentious) situation between a government and an opposing movement/group/organization, there are several possible strategies for governments to influence the degree of repression/facilitation.
A government can, for instance, disrupt the organization of a group, make communication difficult (or inaccessible), or freeze important resources, and thereby the costs of mobilization will increase. Further repressive antimobilization strategies may consist of suspending newspaper publication, prohibiting assemblies, drafting strikers, or arresting movement leaders. Likewise, a government can act directly upon the costs of collective action, for example by imposing harsher penalties or removing the targets of possible action.141

The facilitation also presents two sides, the first of a familiar type: antimobilization activities, such as group publicity and the legalization of the group’s membership. The second side is the economic aspects (costs) of collective action, that is, activities that directly reduce the group’s collective action costs, such as strategic expertise and information, support of the group’s action, or even prevention of action by the group’s enemies. Tilly emphasizes that the model above does not show any direct connection between collective action and repression/facilitation. Rather it portrays the possible influences on collective action by repression/facilitation as acting on power.142

In a more systematic setting, Tilly argues that the degree of repression is never only a matter of more or less. It is always selective, and likewise a combination of repression, toleration and facilitation. Further, he asserts that governments that repress at the same time also facilitate. When specific costs of collective action for some groups are raised, the costs of collective action for other groups are lowered.143 Here, inclusion of one group hence signifies exclusion of another. As argued in the initial section on political opportunity, the State structure, legislative framework, access to the State, and political contention are decisive for the movements and their level of probable success in mobilization.

**Protest Cycles**

When it comes to the modus operandi of social and political movements, a great number of scholars have developed discussions on popular protest activities, and the possibility to theoretically discover cycles of protest is

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141 Ibid: 100-107
142 Ibid.
brought forward. These ideas go back to a pioneering work by Michael Lipsky from 1968 on the use of popular protest as a political mobilization resource and strategy for marginalized groups. As he argues, protest is a convenient strategy for the “relatively powerless groups” in their struggle to achieve their goals and recognition. At the same time, though, Lipsky emphasizes that the availability of “more skilled professionals” is decisive for the protest movement; lawyers, for example, are extremely important in order for the organization/group to take advantage of opportunities presented through the judicial framework of the political system in which it operates.144

Sidney Tarrow is one of the most quoted scholars in the research on protest as a political strategy for social and political movements. He defines protest as “disruptive collective action aimed at institutions, elites, authorities, or other groups on behalf of the collective goals of actors or of those they claim to represent.” Five principal components are mentioned in Tarrow’s definition:

1)  Protests are direct, not representative, collective actions by authors that repudiate institutional mediation.
2)  Protests aim firstly at disruption (not specifically at violence, although violence is considered the ultimate disruption form. More commonly, the protests aim at disrupting economic processes, official routines and government business.).
3)  Protests are expressive (often with symbolic and non-negotiable demands).
4)  Protests involve claims that impinge on political or economic elites (or other groups).
5)  Protesters are strategic as to choices of goals, issues and targets. The decision behind specific collective action is the result of incentive interplay, calculation of possible risks, and the estimated (perceived) costs.145

The pressure from below by social and political organizations to achieve political and institutional changes can be manifested in differing ways, from the organization of local small or mass meetings, to the establishment of alternative newspapers, radio and television stations, strikes, demonstrations,

144 Lipsky, 1968.
invasions and other kinds of protest actions. The analytical approaches related to political opportunity structures have been well received among Latin American social scientists, particularly the dimension of protest cycles, in order to analyze political and societal changes related to popular protest and the growth of new political organizations. The contention between authorities and challengers within the political opportunity structures can contribute to a general new view of the possibilities within the political system, and it can also reveal weaknesses of the system previously concentrated in the authorities. These situations can cause a snowball effect, challenging more and more citizens and organizations to enter the political system within the wider political opportunity frames.

The theoretical and analytical approach to political processes (in which the political opportunity structures framework is frequently embedded) pays systematic attention to the political and institutional environment around social and political movements. Donatella della Porta and Mario Diani explain that in social movement studies, the main focus of the political process approach is the “relationship between institutional political actors and protest. In challenging a given political order, social movements interact with actors who enjoy a consolidated position in such an order.” This perspective has accomplished a shift of attention towards political interactions between traditional actors (elites/authorities) and new actors (challengers). Likewise, the approach focuses on the particular modus operandi of the movements and the institutionalized systems of representation of interests.

The protest cycles can include, for example, a series of demonstrations and pressure by social (or political) movements for political reforms, such as the demands for local self-government and decentralization reforms. The character of any protest cycle depends on how changes in political opportunity structures are perceived and used. In the case of divisions within

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146 For a political opportunity structures and protest cycles approach to the analysis of Venezuela’s recent political development, see, for example: García-Guadilla, 2003; Canache, 2002; López Maya, 1999; Salamanca, 1998, 1999; Canache & Kulishke, 1998; Levine, 2000. For a collection of studies on protest movements in Latin America, see: Eckstein, 1989; López Maya, 1999; Uggla, 2002 (particularly Bolivia).

147 Tarrow, 1994: 24.

political leadership or the creation of new electoral arenas open for competition, possibilities for collective action are opened and stimulated.\textsuperscript{149}

In the present dissertation, the political pressure from below will be relevant to analyze as one of the explanatory factors of what became a general credibility crisis in relation to the traditional Venezuelan political parties (the authorities – AD and COPEI) and that eventually undermined the entire political system. In early theoretical studies on protest cycles, a general broad approach dominated in seeking structural answers to protest, for example, young people “rebelling” against their elders and the (repressive) “system.” Tarrow concludes that these efforts often ended up in organic and holistic theories that were most difficult to operationalize. More recent theories have delimited the scope and looked for cyclical patterns in just part of a societal or political system (e.g., electoral behavior). Yet these approaches still require a separation of distinct dynamics of change in different components (or dimensions) of a political system.\textsuperscript{150}

**The Politics Model**

The politics model defines politics as the strategic interaction of persons and other actors, who have different beliefs, attitudes, values, and goals as they decide particular conflicts over the distribution of resources and general issues of political rules within a context of norms, expectations, and institutions. Any of the rules, expectations, and institutions may be revised, maintained, or inverted by the individuals who win the right to control them, in the course of those political negotiations that are sometimes called cooperation, and sometimes are called war, and are usually somewhere between the two.\textsuperscript{151}

With a mixed theoretical approach as in this study, one simple but theoretically beneficial way of viewing changes in behavior of political actors due to institutional and political changes (and accordingly to political opportunity structures) related to decentralization can be analyzed in a causal model as presented below.\textsuperscript{152}

\textsuperscript{149} Tarrow, 1994: 6.
\textsuperscript{150} Tarrow, 1989: 15.
\textsuperscript{151} Lane, 1997: 10. The end of the quote implicitly draws on Claus von Clausewitz and his statement on war and politics as more or less the continuation of one another but with other means/weapons.
\textsuperscript{152} Ibid.: 64.
The Politics Model

The “Politics Model” is developed by political scientist Ruth Lane and helps to theoretically perceive and approach political processes (including attention to actors’ rational choice and structural conditions) in social science research through the actors and their relationships with the surrounding structures. Generally, the politics model is defined in ten points:

1) Emphasis on full, contextual political situations
2) Focus on individual decision makers
3) Attention to beliefs, values and cognition of individuals
4) Special attention to the variety of individual goals
5) Recognition that interaction between actors is decisive to outcomes
6) Inclusion of physical, social and personal resources of the “players”
7) Emphasis on the importance of official and unofficial rules and institutions
8) Emphasis on the political process by which values are allocated and rules and institutions changed or maintained
9) An interactive logic, in which one set of interactions sets the structure for following phases
10) Research that goes deeper, seeking underlying processes.  

With respect to the relevance and usefulness of this model for the present study, the ten descriptive points above can be characterized theoretically as

153 Ibid.: 3-26, 64.
follows. Whereas points 1 and 7 can be said to represent a broader structural view, points 2–6 are focused on the actors. Point 8 explicitly focuses on the political process (even if it is the result of the relationships between actors and structures). Point 9 is related to point 8, but with a clearer focus on the actors-structure relationship, while point 10 repeats the process-analytical view. Some more needs to be said about this model, which Lane qualifies as a method in political science research. The basis of the politics model as a method is first to focus on political events in their broad complexity, then to cautiously divide these political events into particular individual sequences and components. At this stage, the analysis of the interaction between components can be initiated. In the studies of distinct political outcomes, the analyst can use a behavioral logic, and through this the “model” is created.\textsuperscript{154}

The studies on party system transformation and State reform, as well as the behavior and strategies by actors (e.g., party leaders, reformists or conservatives), can benefit from this basic model (my comment). Lane clarifies that the politics model can be used as an analytical method to penetrate and analyze the larger questions within political science, such as changes within political parties, both in government and in opposition. In the analyses of political processes, actors’ behavior and structural circumstances, the model can contribute to a more dynamically open view, revealing the possible developments and changes. One objective is hence to bring more clarity into the analysis of processes in comparison to other, more static, models.\textsuperscript{155} For these reasons, I see no relevant obstacle to presenting the politics model in this study as an additional expression of the ideas of political opportunity structures. On the contrary, the mixed dialectic approach appears most adequate for the analytical research on political movements and party system transformations.

**A Game-Theoretic Support**

Before going any further in the theoretical and methodological approaches, it is worth considering a supportive approach, incorporating a further rational choice aspect of game theory. This will be useful for the possibility of perceiving the behavior of the study’s main political actors in another light: that is, a psychological view of conservatives and reformists in the traditional parties as well as challengers in alternative political movements.

\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.: 7.

\textsuperscript{155} Ibid.: 61-63.
in opposition. This additional underlying approach serves the purpose of complementing the main theoretical points of departure, even if rational choice and game theory are embedded in the political opportunity structures.

During the 1980’s, the traditional Venezuelan political elite confronted a crisis and social pressures that were so strong it seemed nothing remained but to dramatically sacrifice the old system and introduce new rules of the political game. In a most enlightening paper called “Understanding the Great Power Give-Away: Decentralization in the Andes,” Kathleen O’Neill approaches the arguments for decentralization reforms from economic, political science and game-theory perspectives. First of all she presents three alternative (but inter-related) theories on the factors that contributed to decentralization reforms in the Andean countries, namely, fiscal crisis, international pressure, and social and economic heterogeneity of the population, contributing to political pressures from below.\footnote{O’Neill, 1998: 14-18. See also Willis, Garman & Haggard, 1999: 19; Grindle, 2000.} The third factor is relevant to consider in this study, since a deeper comprehension of the political game within the different political parties at the different political-territorial levels is also fundamental for understanding how decentralization was introduced in Venezuela. Nevertheless, the first two factors of fiscal crisis and international pressure without doubt also contributed to these processes.

O’Neill also contributes a game-theoretic model for a clearer comprehension of decision-making processes in political parties before a decentralization reform. The elections determine which party gains office, and they also provide information on the party’s support nationwide and regionally. As she argues, elections in a centralized system can be seen as lotteries, that is, a winner-takes-all principle. Furthermore, in all elections, parties calculate with the model:

\[
P(W) + (1-p) L
\]

W stands for the price of winning and L for losing, which make the equation a zero-sum game, since \( W=1 \) and \( L=0 \). The subjectively determined \( p \) refers to the party’s information (and expectations) about electoral support. With enough long-term perspective, parties can try to predict the probable outcome of such “lotteries” when making policy. Politicians might speculate
in maximizing their electoral chances associated with decentralization.\textsuperscript{157} Following this logic, a victorious party would never decentralize.\textsuperscript{158} In the present study, it is most interesting to examine how much the political pressure from below (and also within the AD party) contributed to the final recognition of political decentralization in Venezuela. However, in a strong and stable two-party system, the equation presented by O’Neill might not necessarily end up in a zero-sum. The AD-COPEI partyarchy (or populist model of elite conciliation, as some researchers prefer to label it) is an example of departures from the model. This evolution will be analyzed more deeply in due course.

Some Characteristics of Political Parties in Latin America

Now, to approach the continental historical evolution of the political parties. The party systems of the Latin American nations share some basic structural characteristics worth considering to better understand the development of individual parties, changes in party systems and the difficulties related to political reforms, such as political decentralization. Already in 1971, Ronald H. McDonald presented six major characteristics of Latin American parties, differentiating them from other political cultures (with the risk of generalizing, of course), namely:

1) Elitism
2) Regionalism
3) Transitionalism
4) Personalism
5) Factionalism
6) Organization

The elitist characteristic refers to the tradition of controlling the internal decision-making processes, that is, a political centralization of power. The regionalist trademark suggests an influence by regional factors in the parties, common in developing countries, where regional culture and economic ties become stronger than national ones.\textsuperscript{159} Returning briefly to the development of political protest movements, there are clear regional differences between

\textsuperscript{157} See also Przeworski, 1991: first chapter, for a line of argument on parties as winners and losers in democratic elections.
\textsuperscript{159} McDonald, 1971: 7-15.
the Venezuelan states. The state of Falcón has a history marked by anti-government mobilization since the days of Liberator Simón Bolívar. The state of Lara has also been known as a traditionally rebellious, including guerrilla, center, even during the 20th century. The transitionalist pattern refers to the constant realignments of parties and the appearance of new parties, provoked by economic, cultural and political changes in the Latin American societies.

In recent political science research, increased attention has been given to the volatility level of party systems. On average, Latin American party systems have been shown to be three times more volatile than Western European party systems. Personalismo (or personalism) might be a necessary feature in most political cultures, although there are differences between Latin American political parties and, for example, the personalist trademarks of North American parties. Historically, Latin American parties have often become an institutionalized extension of a political personality, and often the party fails to re-form if the leader dies. The fifth characteristic is interrelated with personalism and elitism, and describes the tradition of concentrating in factions within parties and following individual personalities. The repercussions of factionalism often result in the formation of new parties, due to conflicts between the leaderships within the party. Finally, McDonald mentions the particularity of Latin American party organization. With some exceptions (like PRI in Mexico, APRA in Peru, and AD and COPEI in Venezuela), the parties tend to be more loosely organized, a sort of ad hoc organizations that live only during electoral campaigns. With regard to the factionalist trait of the parties, most relevant in this study, Viscount Bolingbroke (1678-1751), a contemporary of Montesquieu and one of the first intellectuals to study and analyze the role and functioning of political parties, writing from a most skeptical viewpoint stated: “Governing by party…must always end in the government of a faction…. Party is a political evil, and faction is the worst of all parties.”

The Populist Tradition

Charismatic domination rests on the affectual and personal devotion of the follower to the lord and his gifts of grace (charisma). They comprise especially magical abilities, revelations of heroism, power of mind and of speech. The eternally new, the non-routine, the unheard of and the emotional rapture from it are sources of personal devotion.\(^{165}\)

McDonald does not mention the characteristics of clientelism and populism. With regard to the second, this is possibly due to the fact that the academic debate on populism was limited at that time.\(^{166}\) As for populism, it is not surprising that the academic debate on populist political leadership reappears precisely in Latin America. In no other place on earth have discussions of the concept of populism been so frequent as in the history of the Latin American countries, including populism as a proper political system. Political movements, parties and governments have appeared and come to power with an evidently strong leader and a direct relationship to the popular masses. The most well-known definition of the normally vague concept of populism is the one by Kenneth Roberts, who presents five characteristics of the distinct types of populism:

1) A political leadership concentrated in a personalist and paternalist patron (not necessarily charismatic).
2) A multi-class and heterogeneous political coalition, with a concentration in subordinated societal sectors.
3) A political mobilization process directed from above, that avoids or subordinates the institutionalized mediation processes, to instead use more direct relationships between the leader and the masses.
4) An amorphous and eclectic ideology, characterized by a discourse that emphasizes the subordinated sectors or that is anti-elitist and/or anti-establishment.


\(^{166}\) Though the classic work of Ghita Ionescu and Ernest Gellner on the characteristics and societal roots of populism was published already in 1969, it was not until a few decades later that the populist debate became general and high fashion among Latin Americanists. In defense of McDonald, in part, his general traits of personalism and sometimes elitism can be important elements of populism. Clientelistic behavior related to the political parties will be treated in the coming empirical chapters, and therefore not here.
5) An economic project that uses broad redistributive or clientelistic methods to gain support of the popular sectors.\textsuperscript{167}

Swedish political scientist Dennis Westlind has studied more deeply the existence of populism in modern democracies, using a comparative approach. He concludes that populism can be understood only as a type of political discourse, and thus not be defined as a certain number of characteristics of distinct movements or ideologies. Furthermore, he holds that populism cannot be connected to a particular type of political goal, and neither does it typically exist in certain political ideologies (it exists among both left-wing and right-wing politicians and parties).\textsuperscript{168}

In the studies of Latin American political developments, and Venezuela’s are no exceptions, it is worth considering the populist tradition in analyzing political transformations as well as studying decentralization processes. In the 1990’s, as a response to general political discontent and/or the deepening credibility crises of the traditional political parties, several Latin American societies experienced a return to the political culture of populism, or neo-populism. Collor de Melo in Brazil, Fujimori in Peru and Chávez in Venezuela are a few examples. In all cases, a more direct relationship between the leader and the masses has taken place, thus replacing the ordinary institutional process through the parliamentary system and also subordinating the role of the political parties. Another common trait of the emergence of a populist movement is a situation marked by deterioration of the party system, economic crisis and social decomposition, as in the recent cases of Ecuador, Peru and Venezuela.\textsuperscript{169}

One important distinction between classic populism and neo-populism, however, is that the latter is not as multi-class as the former. Neo-populist leadership builds support mainly on the excluded sectors of the population, often with a sort of anti-heroic leader who promises economic redistribution and solutions to the problems of the marginalized sectors. Rejection of the party-based model of political and governmental system is a further characteristic of this Latin American neo-populism, along with popular mass

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\textsuperscript{167} Roberts, 1998b: 381.
\textsuperscript{168} Westlind, 1996: 222-223.
\textsuperscript{169} Madueño, 2002: 56-57.
mobilization around the leader (the leader-masses condition of populism).\footnote{Ibid.: 58-59.} The centralist traits of the populist/neo-populist leadership involve a fundamental constraint on the decentralization processes and on local and regional political actors in the democratic territory. Accordingly also on the prospects of strengthening the political parties (and social movements) at all levels.

Among modern social movement theorists the concept of the “parliament of the streets” is frequently used in the context of popular protests. Populist political movements have also taken advantage of this way of building legitimacy on popular support rather than through ordinary parliamentary process. On occasions, stalemates can be provoked between frustrated crowds taking the streets and a president incapable of challenging the popular discontent. Under these circumstances, the traditional political transmission belts are forced out and a populist leader or movement might then appeal to the masses. A common grievance or demand thus fuels a new form of loyalty between leader(s) and masses beyond the institutionalized political sphere.
POLITICAL POWER AT THE REGIONAL AND LOCAL LEVELS

Today, a growing number of historians and social scientists agree that in order to understand the dynamics of political and socio-economic development, studies of the national level are simply not enough. Realistic analysis must be extended to include both the regional and local spatial levels. Since this study considers more than the national level alone, it is important (using Migdal’s expression) to analytically disaggregate the State into levels:

1) The trenches, with the local officials, like policemen or tax collectors, who directly execute State directives, possibly in the face of strong societal resistance;

2) The dispersed field offices: local and regional bodies that rework and organize State policies, “or even formulate and implement wholly local policies”;

3) The agency’s central offices, i.e., the central bureaus in the capital where national policies are formulated and where resources for implementation are organized;

4) The commanding heights, i.e., the top executive leadership of the State.171

The State is thus present on all societal levels. The importance of studying the regional and local evolution seems particularly clear in the case of Venezuela because of its being so heterogeneous in geographic, economic, social and ethnic terms. When turning to the meso (see discussion by Foweraker in chapter 2 on the meso-level of collective action) or regional spatial level, we normally find the problems formulated more clearly with reference to economic, social and political sectors. When turning to a still lower spatial level, the local one, the overview may suffer, as many phenomena become even more concrete. Closeness to the environment and the interplay of human actors are great advantages of research at the local level. Also, the results obtained can be used as a check on generalizations launched on both regional and national levels.172

172 Mörner & Lalander, 1997. The relative heterogeneity or homogeneity of Venezuelan society can of course be discussed, and depends on the focus and cases of comparison (see, e.g., Buxton, 2001: 11).
Returning to Migdal’s ideas of strong societies and weak States, in Latin America, State institutions are (normally) more or less permanently established among the citizens, but the operation of State policies in practice functions quite differently on the local and regional levels, that is, in the social realities. One aspect that Migdal does not directly emphasize is corruption and clientelism, although he agrees that the personnel of the State on all levels need to identify with the objectives of the State, in order to achieve institutional and political efficiency.  

Decentralization: Conceptual Definitions

*Political decentralization* refers to the establishment or reestablishment of elected autonomous subnational governments capable of making binding decisions in at least some policy areas.

As shown in recent debates on modernization of the State, decentralization has become a priority and a key element on political agendas in different parts of the world. In social sciences, decentralization is the process in which governmental power (or parts of that power) and the responsibility for it are transferred from the central national level to the provincial/regional state and/or local/municipal political-territorial levels. This implies that the services offered by the State, for example, health care, medical assistance, education, police authority and the like are established under local and/or regional responsibility.

Normally, three fundamental conditions are mentioned in discussing decentralization: first, the existence of territorial units to administer; second, the right of citizens to select their own regional/local political leaders; third, the auto-financing capacity of the particular political-territorial units. Regarding the first two conditions, that is, political and administrative decentralization, the first normally points to giving more political power (or influence) to the citizens, as stated in a rather pioneering work on decentralization by Kochen and Deutsch. The administrative decentralization, on the other hand, indicates a delegation of command and

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174 Willis, Garman & Haggard, 1999: 1.
control authority to functionaries and agencies that are closer to the citizens.\footnote{175 Kochen & Deutsch, 1980: 166.}

Decentralization can be seen as a political strategy in response to conflicts and tensions caused by the incapacity of State authorities to satisfy citizens’ needs and demands, due to the lack of channels for political and citizen participation. A basic assumption is that local entities would be more competent with regard to decisions concerning the priorities and needs of the citizens concerned. Decentralization is thus a process of institutional changes that bring the State closer to the citizens. To avoid possible confusion further on in the study, it has to be clarified that the local level normally refers to the municipal level, and that the regional level refers to the federal regional state level.

Traditionally, decentralization is identified with the local community (municipal level), but actually, decentralization is an organizational form that can be used on all levels of government. Likewise, the degree to which a political, institutional, administrative and State system is centralized/decentralized has various dimensions and involves various inter- and intra-governmental relations and tensions between the distinct levels: national-regional, national-local, and regional-local. Regarding the possible existence of such inter- and intra-governmental tensions, very often the political-territorial maps create confusion and insecurity, both among the citizens and the political leaders. Historically, the concept of decentralization has frequently been contrasted to the concepts of federalism, centralism, deconcentration and delegation.

The concept of federalism has its root in the Latin \textit{foedes}, which means alliance, union or federal agreement/treaty. Conceptually, federalism is also used to describe a certain political system that is characterized by institutional independence and autonomous faculties of territorial subsystems (federal states), which normally enjoy constitutional guarantees. A fairly authoritative definition of federalism is: “a political organization in which the activities of government are divided between regional governments and a central government in such way that each kind of government has some activities on which it makes final decisions.”\footnote{176 Lijphart, 1999: 186.}
The ideas of federalism as an organizational political system in Venezuela date back to the early 19th century and the formation of the First Republic in 1811, but it was not until the Constitution of 1863 that federalism was officially established. In federations, the legislative power is divided according to a dual order. The central (federal) level can make and enforce laws that are valid for the whole nation. At the same time, there exists a constitutionally guaranteed role for the legislative assembly of each federal state (or region or province). Several Latin American nations (e.g., Venezuela, Brazil and Mexico) are federations, as well as the North American States (Canada and the U.S.). The federative system thus means that citizens are bound both by national and specific regional laws (valid only in their own federal state). The federative system is often applied in very large countries (both in population and territory). When the Republic of Venezuela was born, the Constitution of 1811 gave broad powers to the six provinces that constituted the nation (Mérida, Cumaná, Barinas, Margarita, Trujillo and Caracas). The provinces of Maracaibo, Guayana and Coro remained initially under Spanish colonial rule. This vision of nationality developed during the period when Venezuela was part of Gran Colombia (until 1830).

Now, decentralization can be related theoretically and conceptually to deconcentration, since both systems refer to a transfer of powers (e.g., from national to regional or local level). However, deconcentration concerns the process through which the national central government is present in local and/or regional entities. Decentralization, on the other hand, refers to the transfer of services, competencies and resources from the central, national government to the local communities and/or the regions. Delegation, sometimes also confused with decentralization, can be defined as the time-limited assignation of functions to an entity having a different juridical nature. The signification of decentralization is often better understood in a comparison with its opposite: centralization. Decentralization can be perceived as the antithesis of centralization, but practically speaking, probably neither a totally centralized nor a totally decentralized system would function, at least not well enough to deserve to be called a system. Decentralization is thus more a process than a system and is also so multi-

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dimensional that it functions theoretically rather as an umbrella term to cover the descriptions of various processes.\textsuperscript{180}

Administrative and political centralization and decentralization describe a special kind of power hierarchy. Centralization, or centralism, could be described as pyramidal scheme of government in which the power of decisions is concentrated at the very top of the State. The administrative centralized structure of the Spanish American countries is to a large extent an inheritance from the Spanish colonist Crown, and this tradition has also marked the decision-making process and the structure of many Latin American political parties.

**The Tocquevillian Contribution**

I think that extreme centralisation of government ultimately enervates society and thus, after a length of time, weakens the government itself; but I do not deny that a centralised social power may be able to execute great undertakings with facility in a given time and on a particular point.\textsuperscript{181}

Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) probably never used the concept of decentralization, certainly not to apply to the dismantling of the Welfare State (in Latin America, to democratize populist or nationalist systems). But he was surely in favor of what is known today as the subsidiarity principles\textsuperscript{182} of decentralization and a closer relationship between citizens and the State.\textsuperscript{183} Already in the 1830’s Tocqueville put special emphasis on the importance of politically active citizens, collaborating with each other and with the State and with a decentralized kind of state. Clearly inspired by Montesquieu’s ideas of institutional pluralism and separation of powers, Tocqueville based the idea of popular citizen rule at the local level on his experiences in America. There he saw that a decentralized government,

\textsuperscript{180} Dilla Alfonso, 1997: 170-171.
\textsuperscript{182} The subsidiarity principle as described in the Maastricht Treaty of the European Union Member States refers to the system of divisions of responsibility between the Union and the National States, in which decisions are taken as closely as possible to the citizens. In the EU States, local and regional authorities are supposed to have responsibility for a major part of the public sector tasks.
\textsuperscript{183} Uggla, 1996.
based on a vertical division of powers, was possible, which was to be contrasted to the highly centralized French State of the time.\textsuperscript{184} The phenomenon making this kind of democracy possible (and even, I would add, a necessary feature of it) was the virtue of civil society, which made a central government less important.\textsuperscript{185}

Even Venezuelan Liberator Simón Bolívar included discussions of federalism and the virtues of a decentralized form of government in his political discourse, and he admitted to being impressed by the democratic system of the United States, where he had spent over four months before returning to Venezuela from exile. However, Bolívar considered that it would be extremely difficult to implement a decentralized system in the Latin American states and that it would lead to chaos; he therefore defended a highly centralized political system. Bolívar’s most important teacher, Simón Rodríguez, stated (what would later become a key influence for Hugo Chávez) that:

Spanish America is an original construct. Its institutions and its government must be original as well, and so too must be the methods used to construct them both. Either we shall invent, or we shall wander around and make mistakes.\textsuperscript{186}

The difference between the political and cultural circumstances of Latin America and North America in that era is often mentioned as fundamental for understanding the very different paths of development Latin American nations took compared to the United States. Returning to Tocqueville’s line of argument, what made the decentralized participatory democracy possible was the political culture, “the mores,” of the citizens and the society as a whole. So, even if various Latin American nations copied the U.S. Constitution, they could not copy what had given the principle of the Constitution life among the citizens, “the mores.” It is appropriate here to return to the theories of political opportunity structure, since Tocqueville was probably the first to discuss the degree of State centralization as decisive for the political opportunity structures of social movements. The arguments for local self-government and decentralization go back to the days of Aristotle and his recommendations that the territorial size of a

\textsuperscript{184} Hadenius, 2001 a: 2-7; Siedentop, 1994: 11-12.
\textsuperscript{185} Siedentop, 1994: 34-44.
\textsuperscript{186} Gott, 2000: 113.
democratic society not be bigger than what could be seen from the top of a hill.

To return to the theoretical framework of the political society, considered in the context of developing countries, the United States of America of the early 19th century was itself a developing country, with recently established institutions. As Somjee emphasizes, many Europeans were quite skeptical about the new American model of liberal democracy and doubted that it would survive. Tocqueville was impressed by the way the post-independence United States developed without an aristocratic involvement comparable to that of European countries. With a normative commitment based on the ideal of equality, the structure of political institutions in the U.S. presented widespread political access for citizens compared to European experiences. At the same time, the leaders still made sure that in practical political terms this development did not exceed certain limits. Tocqueville thus saw strength in the nascent North American political society, in its balance between *mores*, customs and behavior of the citizens.\(^\text{187}\)

Regarding the relationship between the decentralized political and institutional system and the role of the party system, Tocqueville emphasized that the work of the extremely active parties which surrounded “the peaceful citizens” at the local level were striving for the best for the nation. The ambitions of the parties were, for Tocqueville, to make the citizens into supporting troops.\(^\text{188}\) However, the relevance and usefulness of North American political life as a model that might serve as a point of departure here could be questioned. The civic engagement and virtues described by Tocqueville differ a great deal from the political behavior of the citizens today, after globalization and technological revolutions.\(^\text{189}\)

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\(^\text{188}\) Tocqueville (1), 1997: 241-250.

\(^\text{189}\) On the decreasing political participation in United States, see, for example: Putnam, 1997; Verba et al., 1995.
Decentralization and Democratization

The democratization of democracy first of all implies decentralization – but not as a one-way process. Globalization creates a strong impetus and logic to the downward devolution of power, but also an upward devolution. Rather than merely weakening the authority of the nation-state, this double movement – a movement of double democratization – is the condition of reasserting that authority, since this movement can make the state more responsive to the influences that otherwise outflank it all around.\(^{190}\)

Decentralization can in many cases be considered a type of democratization. Reuschemeyer, Stephens and Stephens build their discussion around the definition of democratization as an increase in political equality.\(^{191}\) In *Polyarchy* of 1971, Robert Dahl assumes that “when hegemonic regimes and competitive oligarchies move toward polyarchy they increase the opportunities for effective participation and contestation and hence the number of individuals, groups, and interests whose preferences have to be considered in policy making.”\(^{192}\) Concurring with Reuschemeyer et al., Dahl concludes that “a key characteristic of a democracy is the continuing responsiveness of the government to the preferences of its citizens, considered as political equals.”\(^{193}\) In the context of political opportunities and party system transformation, decentralization can indeed make a difference for the possibilities of alternative political movements to participate and compete for political power.

In this context of new opportunities for previously excluded (political) actors, new loci of conflict emerge as well (as a result of the possibly clashing priorities of the newly incorporated actors or groups vis-à-vis the “traditional” ones). These ideas of Dahl’s about polyarchic transitions can be fruitful in the studies of party systems and decentralization reforms. Dahl illustrates this conflict situation between government and opposition in terms (and degrees) of costs of toleration. The deeper the conflict between a government and the opposition is, the more probable it is that each party will try to deny the other opportunities to participate in effective policy making.

\(^{190}\) Giddens, 1998: 72-73.
\(^{191}\) Reuschemeyer et al., 1992: 5. See also Lijphart, 1999: 282.
\(^{193}\) Ibid.: 1-2.
In this situation, the opposition is obliged to acquire control of the State if it is to be able to put its own priorities on the political agenda; that is, the government and the opposition have to change places.\textsuperscript{194}

I would suggest that the legitimacy of a democratic society depends on the linkages between civil society groups and the State. Even if democracy has been consolidated, or accepted by all political actors as “the only game in town” (to use Adam Przeworski’s classical words), democratization is a continuous process in various social and political arenas. As Seymour Lipset concluded in 1959 in \textit{Political Man}, in all democratic systems there are built-in group conflicts that actually function as the pulse of democracy itself. A situation with reasonable conflicts between parties can here be said to be a core definition of democracy. Regarding the legitimacy and political stability of the democratic system in particular countries, these depend on historical and cultural factors that have decided which issues and problems in society become most important.\textsuperscript{195}

Even if democratization in Venezuela was initiated much earlier than elsewhere in Latin America, the democracy perspective has to be considered central to the discussion of the relationships between State and society, including those related to decentralization reforms and their implications for the party system. The problem here is to find a balance between the two in a democratic context. As Axel Hadenius puts it, “Society tries by this means to govern the state by which it is governed.”\textsuperscript{196} There is an ongoing debate on the advantages and disadvantages of decentralization. In another recent work Hadenius presents some pros and cons in this respect.

\textsuperscript{194} Ibid.: 14-16.

\textsuperscript{195} Lipset, 1969: 64. See also Przeworski, 1991: 12-13.

\textsuperscript{196} Hadenius, 2001 a: 1 & 2003.
Decentralization: Pros and Cons

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<th>PROS</th>
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<td>- <strong>Democratic merits</strong> (political power closer to the citizens, who can influence more easily). &lt;br&gt; - <strong>Vertical division of powers</strong> (to avoid power concentration and thus possibilities of mismanagement). &lt;br&gt; - <strong>Smoothening effects on conflicts</strong> (the aspect of accessibility of minority groups to political power). &lt;br&gt; - <strong>Possibilities to improve efficiency through experiments at different decision centers</strong> (new methods and working strategies can be tested and later possibly applied at a national level = diversity as an advantage). &lt;br&gt; - <strong>Provision of opportunities for parties and factions in opposition at the center to exercise some measure of political power</strong> (“and in federal, three-tier systems, opportunities at two of these three tiers”).&lt;br&gt;</td>
<td>- Lower electoral participation on the local and regional levels (a general tendency).&lt;br&gt; - Often higher risks of corruption and administrative mismanagement on the local and regional levels.&lt;br&gt; - Radical political and institutional changes are easier to carry out with a centralized system (e.g., a military-style top-down coordination system in reform strategies).&lt;br&gt; - Citizens receive different service and/or treatment in different regions (i.e., a rupture of the equality principle).&lt;br&gt; - Risks of a deepening separation and dissolution of the Nation State.</td>
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Regarding the con arguments relating to corruption and possibilities of mismanagement, Hadenius asserts that decentralization requires the creation of an efficient control apparatus. As mentioned, and also evident in the table, democratization at the local level can be crucial for the prospects of democratic government at the national level. Jonathan Fox puts up four interrelated arguments for political, administrative and fiscal decentralization, namely:

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197 Hadenius, 2001 b: 134-139.

* Diamond, 1999: 121-122. (This fifth pro-point is provided by Diamond; the rest of the table is from Hadenius.)

198 Hadenius, 2001 b: 134-139.
1) Elected civilian regimes are not to be considered democratic until authoritarian enclaves are eliminated and the entire citizenry effectively enfranchised.

2) Pluralist politics must be learned. Subnational governments make a good school.

3) Rising democratic leaders can enjoy deeper credibility while combating old corrupt traditions if they are formed in local governments.

4) More efficient and targeted programs to get rid of paternalistic traditions in social policies depend on a balanced partnership between national governments, civil society actors and the local governments.199

The arguments for a decentralized political system are thus primarily related to democratization and improved efficiency. The fifth argument in the table above in favor of decentralization is particularly relevant in this study; Diamond emphasizes the political opportunities for opposition parties and thus an opening for political pluralization as an objective for decentralization reforms. He asserts that all political institutions – and particularly political parties – confront a tension (or various tensions) between “the durability features of institutional strength (coherence around principles, programs, and policies; unified action in the legislature and political process; elaborate, well-ordered vertical and horizontal structures) and adaptability. From this perspective, there is a curvilinear relationship between institutionalization (as coherence, routinization, predictability) and both the stability (consolidation) and quality of democracy. Stronger is not necessarily better; political parties and party systems can be over-institutionalized as well as under-institutionalized.”200

199 Fox, 1994: 106.

The Arduous Mission of Successful Decentralization Reform

Modern societies are not monocratic but polycratic. Something that can easily strand the unsuspecting on the quick sands of pluralism. One thing is sure: from the moment we abandon the limited perspective of the political system and extend our field to include the society which underlies it, we come up against centers of power which exist within the state but are not directly identified with the state. Inevitably it is at this point that the problem of democracy encounters the problem of pluralism, and subsumes it, so to speak.201

A lot has been written on why Latin American governments so often fail with the implementation of social reforms, also within the newer decentralized schemes. Political economist Judith Tendler, in Good Government in the Tropics, presents some explanatory factors for what causes governments to improve, based on case studies in the northeastern Brazilian state of Ceara, which can be seen as a relative success story. Exaggerated bureaucracy, corruption and other traditional local and regional political diseases had burdened the state earlier, but innovative leadership on the regional and local levels managed to shift the tradition and accomplish improvements in terms of more efficient and less corrupt State institutions. One key explanatory factor lies in creating a sense of pride among the employed workers and officials of state governorships and municipalities in their functioning and position, a sense of being in charge and responsible within the organization (i.e., efficient delegation, traditionally a key obstacle for Latin American governments).

For Tendler, civil society organizations also proved to play an important role in the positive evolution of government and local leadership, that is, with a dynamic process and interplay between the two, involving and inviting popular participation, but also recognizing the independence of civil society. The decentralization of authority and responsibilities is fundamental in these processes, as is the flexibility of the leadership and the continuity of the good intentions of the government, which contributes to cultural changes among the citizens (like increased trust in State institutions).202 Taking Tendler’s line of argument into consideration, it appears clear that

decentralization encompasses a built-in decontrolling factor for the political parties, proceeding from the hypothesis that a governor (or a mayor) feels responsibility towards the citizens, and that he (or she) makes efforts to achieve efficiency in democratic government.

Probably the most well-known recent Tocquevillian study on decentralization and its consequences for civil society and political parties is Robert Putnam’s classic *Making Democracy Work*, on the experiences of Italian decentralization since 1970. Proceeding from the same question as Tendler on why some governments fail and others succeed, one of Putnam’s main findings is that the civic culture of the citizens (what Tocqueville called the *mores*) is more deeply developed in Northern Italy than in the South. At the same time (agreeing with Tarrow), citizens in “less civic” regions generally talk politics and affiliate with parties as much as the “more civic” ones, but the difference in probable outcome of regional political leadership lies not in the degree of political participation, but in its character. When new institutions were created with the 1970 reform, the social and cultural contexts varied a lot between the North and the South. In the “more civic” regions, local organizations had tighter networks, citizens participated actively in community politics and the level of institutional trust and law-abidingness was higher. The “less civic” regions experienced mistrust, corruption, feelings of powerlessness and lower levels of citizen organization. Citizens in the North have also shown themselves to be more content with regional and local governments, whereas the southerners mind less being governed from the center.

In the context of decentralization, sub-national governments often find themselves thwarted by economic and political elite groups in opposition, which reject and obstruct projects and reforms that the local or regional government wants to implement. This opposition can consist of important business sectors on which the political leadership depends in order to function, for example, for the provision of social services for the citizens. Land-owners, dominant construction companies, local/regional service providers and employers can pressure and even paralyze the political leadership as a means, for example, of forcing the government to decrease

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204 Ibid.: 181-183.
205 Ibid.: 54-56.
This implies that a new (non-traditional) government that lacks or has only weak ties to these traditional elite groups can encounter difficulties if it tries to change the order of things, if privileged elite and business sectors in the region perceive the new policies as a threat, that is. Thus, even if a mayor or governor is elected with a majority of popular support, the lack of good ties to the economic and social elites can result in political fiascos. In this way, a general discontent can deepen among the population, something that is particularly evident in Third World countries with high levels of poverty and huge social cleavages with polarization and unequal income distribution.

In Politician’s Dilemma, Barbara Geddes addresses this problematic situation of the double responsibilities of local and regional political leaders (towards the party or national government and towards the electorate). Should State resources be used for national economic projects or should they be channeled to the citizens and local entrepreneurs for the sake of the elected decision-maker’s political survival? Geddes illustrates the reasoning of politicians before elections with a case study from Brazil. Patron-client traditions affect the probability of being elected (and re-elected), although at the same time they hinder efficient development plans. Likewise, pressures for expected reforms might sometimes have effects on who is elected.207 This two-edged situation for local and regional political leaders illustrates one core aspect of the importance of a decentralization reform and its development, something that is most relevant to consider in a study of a party system transformation. These aspects of the political opportunities presented through decentralization and its consequences for the party system will be more thoroughly analyzed in the empirical chapters to come.

Political scientist Frank Shefter makes a point that is relevant to political opportunity structures and the importance of the party system as decisive for the probability to achieve political reforms and also touches upon the game-theoretic approach in relation to decentralization. Political leaders (the authorities), he points out, will promote reforms only if and when they feel confident that they will not risk being replaced by other political actors and deprived of their economic and political power.208 In this analytical field,

Machiavelli was one of the firsts ever to express the difficulty of achieving successful political reforms, since reformers confront resistance from the establishment leaders, who benefit from status quo.

Men who become rulers by prowess similar to theirs acquire their principalities with difficulty but hold them with ease. The difficulties they encounter in acquiring their principalities arise partly because of the new institutions and laws they are forced to introduce in founding the state and making themselves secure. … Whenever those who oppose the changes can do so, they attack vigorously, and the defense by the others is lukewarm. So both the innovator and his friends come to grief.209

The Latin American Centralist Tradition

In Latin America the centralist mood is supported and strengthened precisely by a political tradition that has always been centralist and has only exceptionally departed from that course.210

Charles Tilly draws on the Tocquevillian ideas of a strong civil society and local self-government in writing that “state-building creates an opportunity structure for collective action of which movements take advantage.”211 In Latin America, the centralization of the State has traditionally been just as great as it was in Tocqueville’s 19th-century France. Speaking of the opportunities for collective action for social movements in Latin America, sociologist Alain Touraine, in his great work on politics and society in Latin America, emphasizes that the subordination of the social movements vis-à-vis the State constitutes the major limitation on the capacity to act.212 Touraine holds that separation between the State and the political system has been more difficult to conceive there than in Europe. In Latin America the State is strongly identified with social actors and political forces. “The State seems to be another name of the political system, or even the defender of social interests.”213

211 Quoted in Tarrow, 1994: 62.
212 Touraine, 1989: 162.
213 Ibid.: 425.
A few further aspects of the traditional Latin American centralist tradition deserve to be underlined for the sake (among others) of comprehending some of the difficulties in carrying out decentralization in Venezuela. Finnish historian Jussi Pakkasvirta emphasizes that the hierarchic structure and the centralism of Iberic colonialism had left a legacy of governmental inefficiency in Latin America, and one might therefore say that the continent suffered a double marginalization as a peripheral region during the 19th century.\footnote{Pakkasvirta, 1997: 52-53.} To further understand the initial conditions of development in the contrast to the leading European industrializing nations, Claudio Véliz presents four negative factors inversely related to the traditional centralism:

1) The absence of feudal experience,
2) The centralism of the dominant religion, i.e., the absence of religious nonconformity,
3) The absence of any occurrence or circumstance that could be compared with the European Industrial revolution, and;
4) The absence of ideological, political and social developments associated with the French Revolution, “that so dramatically transformed the character of Western European society during the past century and a half.”\footnote{Véliz, 1980: 3f.}

The politically and administratively centralist character of the Spanish American nations has its origin in the emphatically centralized Castilian monarchy.\footnote{Ibid.: 16f.} In our case, colonial Venezuela was a rather unimportant backwater in the Spanish empire. The audiencia of Caracas depended both administratively and politically on the more important centers of Bogotá and Mexico.\footnote{Levine, 1989: 250.} When Venezuela, after a lengthy war led by Liberator Simón Bolívar against the Spanish colonizers, achieved her first independence in 1821, huge societal problems were apparent. The “new” State had neither political nor economic control of society. The subsequent civil wars would debilitate the economy and fragment the civil authority throughout the 19th century.\footnote{Coronil, 1997: 258.}
In *Strong Societies and Weak States*, Joel Migdal pursues a most interesting line of argument on why the State in some Third World countries has failed to increase its capacity to direct the behavior of the population and thus be able to dominate societal evolution. The outcome is to show that the stronger, more autonomous and more resistant a society is, the weaker the State will be. “Increased capabilities of states include and rest upon increased state societal control.”

Migdal takes up the myth of the strong Mexican State, which according to him stems from a misunderstanding of the State’s relations to society. Even if organized social activities have been overshadowed by the State in Mexico, this is rather the result of a fragmentation of social control, where local strongmen, *caciques* as they are called, have dominated. The State has had limited social control and thus difficulties in the practical implementation of policies. At the same time, though, there is a situation of mutual dependency in Latin America, and it is rooted in the colonial period. The strongmen depend on State resources to be able to function economically, but this contributes nonetheless to a fragmentation of social control and continued struggles between the State and local/regional strongmen. “Societies must be weakened before a new distribution of social control is possible.”

One might ask if Migdal is actually recommending that society step back in order to give the State more room to act. This could hardly be the case, however, given the fact that Migdal emphasizes a mutual and integrated dependency between the State and societal actors.

During the colonial period, the local and regional governments in Latin America had insignificant power, and no traditions of local self-government took hold. This lack of relevant political and representational power at the local and regional levels has had a clear impact on governmental structures as a whole in Latin America. Even if thousands of citizens in each country hold public offices on the local and regional governmental levels, they still have relatively little influence on the general political evolution.

Politically, the continent was dominated until the 1980’s by centralized top-down governance, including centralized and militarized police authorities.

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220 Ibid.: 228.
221 Ibid.:138-141.
222 Alexander, 1965: 41-42.
appointed (not elected) mayors and governors, and extreme bureaucratic and fiscal centralization.  

Generally speaking, the transformations that the Latin American societies experienced from the 1960’s onwards, such as rapid processes of urbanization, modernization, industrialization and transitions from authoritarian rule to democratic governments, have contributed to far-reaching changes in opportunities for social and political movements. Even changes in cultural values have come about, and new strategies are being used in the political struggle of both individuals and movements. Likewise, the appearance of “new” types of social movements, such as neighborhood organizations, women’s associations and other alternative movements, is another characteristic of the recent political panorama in the continent. Foweraker stresses that Latin American social movements by tradition have been seen as democratic (or democratizing) actors, both in practice and in purpose, from the struggles of the more traditional movements of labor and peasant organizations, to the various new urban social movements.

Caudillismo

The typical political leader in many Latin American countries until the early 20th century was the “strong man on horseback,” the caudillo, normally supported by armed forces, a self-titled general with lower military ranks assigned to his followers. The modern political era in Venezuela begins in 1936, after the death of the “Last of the Caudillos,” Andean dictator Juan Vicente Gómez. The 19th century in Venezuela had been characterized by civil wars alternating between anarchy and political regimes dominated by caudillos, that is, a system of military rule over civilians. The entire period of 1830 to 1935 is referred to as the “era of the Caudillo.” In Caudillism and Militarism in Venezuela, historian Robert Gilmore states that the Venezuelan caudillos dominated the political scene until the oil industry was developed. The consequences of this transformation of the economic structure of the nation contributed to a redefinition of interest groups, which in its turn increased pressure for the introduction of a more representative government and rule of law.

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223 Fox, 1994: 105.
224 See, for example: Foweraker, 1995.
225 Foweraker, 1995:3-4.
The first Venezuelan Constitution of 1811 (and the first in all of Latin America), which gave birth to the “First Republic” of Venezuela, included references to decentralization and federalist guarantees, “a true confederation of independent provinces”. However, the 1811 Constitution fell with the First Republic, since an adoption of a kind of union that permitted a mutual and common defense became necessary under the threats of a possible Spanish re-conquest. The autonomy that the provinces enjoyed during the colonial regime thus weakened drastically. In 1830, Venezuela separated from Gran Colombia, and the Venezuelan regional caudillos sought an agreement to establish a new centralist experiment, though with some federalist guarantees.

In the middle and second half of the 19th century, the federalists made some advances when the regions protested against the centralism of the era, and during this time the twenty federal Venezuelan states were consolidated. After the separation of Venezuela from Gran Colombia, some of the politically marginalized groups (including caudillos) made efforts to gain power under the agitating banners of liberalism or federalism. The liberals presented themselves as the defenders of the interests and rights of the Venezuelan (oppressed) people and as the alternative to the oligarchy of the period.227 The provinces and municipalities increased their political influence during this period, and the central government agreed on some compromises to consolidate the national strength. On the whole, the century was characterized by oscillations between forceful centralist rule and relative autonomy for the caudillos in the provinces.228

It thus seems that despite several coups against the central government and demands for a more genuine federal and politically decentralized system, Simón Bolívar’s arguments for the need to centralize in order to strengthen the nation and to avoid chaos persisted during the 19th century. At the same time, though, the century was all in all characterized by chaos in a long-term perspective. In fact, speaking of tensions and conflicts between the centralist leadership and regional federal forces. When the Venezuelan Independence Act was about to be sealed, the powerful provinces of Maracaibo, Guayana, Valencia and Coro refused to sign in protest against what they considered the hegemony of Caracas and thus political centralization. Political scientist

228 In Guerón & Manchisi, 1996: 357-358.
John Peeler draws on the findings of Gilmore and concludes that after Independence, the old Venezuelan elites were forced into making pacts with regional plebeian caudillos, who in their turn used clientelistic politics in order to consolidate a popular base of support and also to mobilize armed forces. Commonly, caudillos became president, with representatives of the Caracas elites as ministers and financiers. Party affiliation and party loyalty were not strong characteristics of the political system of the period. Some caudillos presented themselves as liberals and others as conservatives.²²⁹

In the 1990’s, Guillermo O’Donnell launched the concept of delegative democracy, which rests on the premise that whoever wins a presidential election is thereby entitled to govern practically however he or she sees fit. Presidential candidates, according to the ideas of delegative democracy, typically present themselves as standing above both organized interests and political parties.²³⁰ At the same time, without recommending the system of delegative democracy, O’Donnell describes how the plebiscitary features of delegative democracy could be observed in almost all Latin American countries before the current social and economic crisis. He adds that rule of this kind has been described earlier under the names of populism and caudillismo, for example.²³¹ This passive (or lazy²³²) type of democracy signifies that the citizens place their political hope in the hands of a political leader (who may be more or less authoritarian), in contrast to the participatory democracy recommended by Tocqueville, with an efficient division of powers and built-in checks-and-balances functions.

In Latin American societies, the caudillos and urban local bosses often became important as political brokers who had the ability to deliver the political electoral will among larger social groups than other political party activists could. Promises of economic rewards fostered the loyalties of local bosses. As a result of this, “personal and collective goals are intertwined, the interests of local-level brokers and high-level politicians are reciprocal, and the channels of political participation become an elaborate web of patron-

²³¹ Ibid.: 62.
²³² The lazy type of democracy refers to the same category as the passive one, but includes also parts of those citizens who do not have political beliefs at all (my definition). It likewise covers the punishment voting phenomenon, i.e., voting against and not for, which will be described in the empirical chapters.
client ties. ... This exchange of goods and services between local bosses and politicians is clientelist politics.\textsuperscript{233}

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{233} Benton, 1997: 3. For an interesting discussion on caudillismo and clientelism and the relationship between the two concepts in Chile and Uruguay, see: Rivarola, 2003: 217, 222-224.
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\end{footnotesize}
Theoretical Summary
Thus far I have presented the elements of the theoretical framework. Before going on to the empirical chapters, a brief summary of the theoretical sections is in order so as to ensure a clear view of the value of each theoretical element and the way these elements relate to each other. The topic of the study is Venezuelan decentralization and the implications of this reform for the political party system. The political opportunity structures theories are considered to be the theoretical core of the whole work and have in fact permeated all the theoretical sections, both those on party systems and on decentralization.

Proceeding in chronological order, the introductory section discusses social movement theory, which is the theoretical school to which political opportunity belongs. Theorists of this field most frequently focus on “social movements” (traditional and new), but a smaller number scholars use the political opportunity approach for research on political parties. In the section on political movements I have mentioned a few of those who do so, and I have argued for the practical impossibility of drawing an exact boundary between what is considered a social and/or a political movement. The section on party systems and their transformations is an important fundament of the study; already in the introductory chapter I took Michael Coppedge’s partyarchy as a point of departure for the study and the relationships of the party system with the decentralization reform. Analytical tools for the calculation of party system volatility and fragmentation are provided along with a model of factors that are crucial in party system collapses.

Throughout the whole party system and political opportunity chapter, my mind has been set on the following chapter on decentralization. The Politics Model is useful for illustrating the political opportunities in the context of decentralization and party system transformation, and it embeds the same actor versus process-structural approach. The “meeting” between the party system and decentralization is always the main focus, and as previously stated, political opportunity structures form the theoretical-methodological cement between the two. The political society section defines the playing field or space of action of the political actors. The structure of this playing field alters with a decentralization reform. The supportive Game-Theoretic Model provides the necessary psychological perspective on how parties or
party leaders might reason before elections, or before a decentralization reform.

The sections on authorities and challengers, repression and facilitation, and protest cycles constitute a deepening of the political opportunity approach, in which the main actors are defined, as well as the possible modus operandi of governments (authorities) and challengers, for instance, before and during a decentralization process. The protest cycles section is included because it provides a mode of perceiving tendencies regarding the activities of political opposition. Examples might be the behavior and action of local and regional opposition political leaders towards the center (the authorities) or of regional political actors of the establishment who feel ignored by their own party’s central leadership. The description of traditional characteristics of Latin American political parties (including populism) contributes the basic setting, political culture, or environment of the study. A party system with certain historical characteristics can be instrumental in the comprehension of the difficulties during a reform (e.g., decentralization).

As is already apparent, the two theoretical blocs do indeed relate and refer a great deal to each other. Likewise, empirical historical examples are smoothly inserted in the theoretical chapters in order to ease the reading and not to cause too brutal a crossing between the chapters. In the second theoretical chapter I decided to include some basic definitions of decentralization and its functions, possible advantages or disadvantages (following the academic debate on the issue), even though, I repeat, the party system is the main dependent variable in this study. For several reasons, I think that the dissertation book would have been poorer without at least this brief discussion of decentralization, and it would also have been quite risky to see only one side of the coin. Moreover, I do not state that the relationship’s direction is only one-way. Rather, I agree with Penfold-Becerra and other scholars that a party system setting can be crucial for the outcome of a decentralization reform.

As will be seen, the impacts of the party system on the decentralization process will have space in the book, particularly in the form of the resistance from traditional political elites who feared that the reform would change the prevailing order and their individual and party privileges. If I had chosen to conduct the study with a reciprocal two-way focus between decentralization and the party system, I would have had to analyze in more detail the measures by which traditional parties blocked or made difficulties for the
transfer of services, responsibilities and resources to regions and municipalities. Probably also including detailed descriptions and statistics of services and authorities at these levels. Likewise, the initial pre-reform setting with its possible constraining elements is described, but the focus (explicit or implicit) is still on the party system and opportunities for political actors.

Summing up, we now have the theoretical and analytical setting:

- Two variables: Decentralization and the political party system (including its fragmentation)
- The reform: Decentralization since 1989 (including background setting and implications for actors and the party system).
- Identified actors and their strategies and relationships: Political parties (and movements) and leaders (including factions, reformists, conservatives, and: alliances). Authorities and challengers. (Compare 10 points of the Politics Model).
- The field of contention: The political society (government on all political-territorial levels).
- Methodology and analytical tools: Mixed/integrated approach: Rational choice and processes-structural aspects (political opportunity embedded), backed up by analysis of volatility, fragmentation and game theory support.

With two variables as complex as party system and decentralization, one theoretical approach is simply not enough. While I do acknowledge that the selection of case(s) is decisive with regard to which relevant factors to include. I also hope that this mixed, integrated theoretical approach and the use of political opportunity structures in combination with the more traditional analytical tools for measuring party system transformations (fragmentation and volatility), will be considered a scientific contribution of value for the research on party systems and decentralization. In the following chapter, our meeting between the Venezuelan party system and decentralization will be analyzed, proceeding from the analytical tools provided by these theoretical chapters.
FORMATION OF THE VENEZUELAN PARTY SYSTEM

In comparison with Latin America as a whole, the modern political evolution in Venezuela is not a continuation of the classic struggle between a conservative and a liberal party. These struggles ended on the battlefields of the Federal War (1870-77), when the forces of General Antonio Guzmán Blanco definitively beat the conservatives. The victory of liberalism was so absolute that even political movements that arose afterwards with typical conservative traits and pursuits used liberalist associations in the names of their organizations.234 The dictatorial regime of el Caudillo Juan Vicente Gómez between 1908 and 1935 was uninterrupted, repressive and personalist. Early industrialization and the [system of] large agricultural landholdings expanded.

In the period between the 1930’s and the 1950’s, Latin American societies (and their economies) experienced profound and important changes in various areas. Besides industrialization and a deeper integration of Latin America in the world market, the traditional kinds of political rule weakened. Generally speaking, the level of literacy and education increased (and contributed to weakening the hitherto dominant political culture). The urbanization processes advanced, which also sapped the strength of traditional society and strengthened other political movements or actors (populists, liberals or socialists). Finally, the Latin American societies became less religious and less Catholic, also with negative repercussions for the previous political culture.235

Venezuelan historian Domingo Irwin suggests that if caudillismo leadership characterized the 19th century, then the following century became more dominated by the Armed Forces as an institution. From the 1940’s on, the modern Venezuelan political parties became increasingly important actors, which became particularly clear after the overthrow of the Pérez Jiménez dictatorial regime. Irwin concludes that these transformations stem from an increased civilian control of State institutions.236 Peeler argues that the logic of the caudillismo of Gómez was so completely developed that there was no possibility for it (caudillismo) to continue after him. He systematically

236 Irwin, 2000: 141.
destroyed all possible rivals and took advantage of the incomes from the expanding oil industry to build a strong State. Even if the two successors of Gómez (Generals Eleázar López Contreras and Isaiás Medina Angarita) stemmed from his political regime, they were not caudillos but more transitional political leaders. “The political order was virtually coterminous with the clientele of the dictator and effectively became the state after his death.”

In _Gómez, el tirano liberal_, Venezuelan historian Manuel Caballero presents several aspects of the life and works of Gómez. As he argues, long before Gómez there had already existed a search for an income source for the State that would permit a de-politicization of the State proper (and independence from the political parties). This money would have to come from abroad. Underground wealth appeared very early in the minds of Venezuelans and foreign investors alike. During the 1910’s and 20’s, North American and Anglo-Dutch petroleum companies and the Venezuelan State reached agreements on the exploitation of the oil industry, which rapidly contributed to making Venezuela one of the major oil exporters in the world.

Interestingly, Gómez was also considered a caudillo at the regional and local levels, particularly in the strategical states of Aragua and Carabobo. He inclusively developed the infrastructure to the regional states and particularly to Maracay (today capital of Aragua), breaking the isolation from Caracas, and made the city Venezuela’s national military, political and

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237 Peeler, 1998: 57; Gilmore, 1965. These days, the Gómez family is still one of the wealthiest in the nation.


239 I am grateful to economic geographer Weine Karlsson for this comment. Conversation in Stockholm, 14 August 2003.

administrative center. Magnus Mörner demonstrates that even if though Gómez to the maximum avoided Caracas as much as possible and preferred staying in Maracay, the centralization of the State reached its highest level ever.241

**From Caudillismo to Party System**

Already during the Gómez dictatorial regime, the political movements that would give birth to several of the modern Venezuelan political parties were initiating social mobilization and plans for a better-structured political organization. As the most important training camp for Venezuelan intellectuals, the Central University of Venezuela –UCV– (*Universidad Central de Venezuela*) was the natural platform for the formation of parties such as Acción Democrática, the Communist Party, and the second social democratic party, the URD (*Unión Republicana Democrática*). As for the formation of AD, without doubt the most important party of the Venezuelan democratic development, the organized mobilization and the critics of the Gómez regime were led by Rómulo Betancourt, historical founder of Acción Democrática and the party’s (almost) unquestioned ideological leader for decades. Swedish sociologist Håkan Thörn presents an interesting perspective on the roles of intellectuals in social and political movements. He holds that in modern societies the intellectuals can be defined as central actors in discursive processes. The concept of intellectuals can nonetheless be perceived as rather ambiguous. On the one hand it has represented a certain social category, with ties to specific social functions or interests. On the other hand it has been a characteristic of a certain kind of activity (“a critically thinking person”).242

In Venezuela, intellectual and political groups emerged and grew within the Venezuelan Student Federation –FEV– (*Federación de Estudiantes de Venezuela*) of the Central University in Caracas. The federation included future political leaders such as Rómulo Betancourt, Raúl Leoni and Jóvito Villalba, who are remembered historically as the Generation of 28 (*Generación del 28*).243 The official formation of Acción Democrática took

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243 Both Betancourt and Leoni would become Venezuelan presidents representing AD, and Villalba was the ideological leader of the URD party. The “28” in Generation of 28 refers to 1928, the year when a famous student week was organized. The practical possibilities of organized opposition to Gómez were concentrated exclusively in the universities (Venezuela
place only in 1941. But in practice, the core of the party had been functioning since the 1920’s and into the late 1930’s under the names of the Democratic National Party –PDN– (Partido Democrático Nacional) and the Venezuelan Organization Movement –ORVE– (Movimiento de Organización Venezolana).

The first of the modern Venezuelan political parties to formally organize, however, was the Communist Party of Venezuela, the PCV (Partido Comunista de Venezuela), which was clandestinely founded in 1931. Like AD, the movement had its central roots in the student movements of the late 1920’s. In the first years after the death of Gómez, during the López Contreras period, both PCV and PDN (which would become AD) operated underground. AD in particular has been historically successful in maintaining and deepening its political organization during dictatorial periods, including from exile and prison cells. Originally, AD was a lot closer to communism and Marxism, and both Betancourt and Villalba openly confessed to being Marxists. The epithet adecó (AD militant) has its roots in the political and ideological categorization of AD during the 1940’s. The Christian democratic critics of AD considered that AD was only a communist party in disguise, thus the AD-CO label.244

COPEI, the party of the Christian Democrats (or Social Christians as they prefer to be called), was founded in 1936 by a young Rafael Caldera. Like AD, the party was rooted in the intellectual generation of 28 movement within the Central University in Caracas (UCV), and Caldera’s group strongly opposed the student organization led by communists and adecós. Ever since then, COPEI has maintained a high number of high-level academics as a core of the party, more than any of the other traditional parties (AD, PCV, URD, etc.). The rigid anti-communist strategy of the Venezuelan Christian Democrats smoothed out in the 1930’s, as in other Latin American countries, when social justice was given higher priority. Despite the fact of its being Catholic in its organizational ties, COPEI has not been a confessional organization. The clandestine Catholic society Opus Dei initially had a high degree of influence in the party, and pushed for pro-business and conservative interests. In order to reject the Communist and

had only two universities at the time, the UCV and the University of the Andes in Mérida –ULA– (Universidad de los Andes), in relation to which the Caracas-based UCV was dominant. (See Levine, 1973: 19-23.)

244 Levine, 1973: 38.
Marxist political threat presented by the groups around Betancourt, and also as opposition to the FEV, Rafael Caldera and his followers created the National Student Union. Initially COPEI was not a national party; before its official party registration, the parties Acción Electoral and Acción Nacional formed the cores of what would develop into the formation of the COPEI party. John Martz describes the ideological development of COPEI since its birth as quasi-Falangist and ultra-nationalistic, although in its first decade it would be more progressive and fundamentally conservative. COPEI was clearly influenced by European Christian Democratic parties, most notably in the postwar period.

A clear difference between Betancourt and Caldera came to light during the two military governments after Gómez. Whereas the former aggressively attacked the governments of López Contreras and Medina Angarita, the latter seemed to have no apparent problems in accepting them as the executive. Medina Angarita legitimized open political party participation (including the PCV) in the early 1940’s. Parliamentary debates as well as freedom of the press intensified during the period, all in all contributing to a general political enthusiasm. However, AD remained critical of several reforms in the area of oil cooperation with the U.S.A.

The development of the party system definitively signified a change in Venezuelan political culture. The system of a Caudillismo leadership was quite rapidly replaced by a party system, with strong machines and deep societal organization. In 1945, Romulo Betancourt and the central leadership of AD allied with a group of middle-rank military officials, among them the future dictator Marcos Pérez Jiménez, and together they managed to overthrow the Medina Angarita regime. One year later, AD and Betancourt won a landslide victory in the presidential elections. At the same time, AD, led by the popular (and populist) Betancourt, succeeded in replacing the PCV as the dominant force within the trade union movement, with the formation of alternative unions parallel to PCV’s. AD outmaneuvered PCV despite the fact that Betancourt cannot be characterized as a “unionist” AD leader, although he did recognize the importance of “good” relations with the trade union movement and the need to incorporate it into the Venezuelan State.

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245 Herman, 1980: 11-15; Caldera, 1981.
247 Ewell, 1984: 167.
Unionism became a grassroots platform for the political party and its mobilization potential. At this time AD had not yet initiated its tradition (which would later become a trademark of the party) of compromises with other elite groups, something that led to increased discontent in other societal groups, especially within the Armed Forces and the Church. In 1948, general elections were held and AD triumphed with the famous author Rómulo Gallegos. This new government, and the first effort of AD to develop a democratic system, was interrupted by another military coup led by Betancourt’s former ally, Marcos Pérez Jiménez, who installed a dictatorial regime which lasted for a decade. These three years of democratic experiment between 1945 and 1948 are remembered as “El Trienio.”

During the dictatorship, party and union leaders of AD and PCV spent long periods in exile or in prison. Despite these constraining circumstances AD succeeded in maintaining its organization and deepening its political project as well. In 1953 elections were held, since Pérez Jiménez felt sure that he would win. But during the vote counting it was evident that the URD was winning, and this provoked Pérez Jiménez to cancel the process and also to prohibit the URD from participating in political activities, as he had already done with AD and PCV. The only traditional party that was not banned during the dictatorial period of Pérez Jiménez was COPEI. Pérez Jiménez feared, however, that COPEI would function as a channel for other political parties, and therefore he tried to pressure Rafael Caldera to reject relations with the illegalized parties. Caldera refused and was sent to prison by Pérez Jiménez. Since Caldera had such intimate connections with the Catholic Church, this situation led to increasing socio-political isolation for Pérez Jiménez.248

In 1957 the dictatorial government of Pérez Jiménez suffered an internal crisis, primarily economic in nature after years of excessive public spending. At the same time, the political parties AD, COPEI, PCV and URD formed an alliance under the name of the “Patriotic Junta” (Junta Patriótica) and initiated the planning of an overthrow of the authoritarian regime. One important group in this organization was the Workers’ Commission, with union representatives from the four parties.249 In addition, the Patriotic Junta established contacts with high military officers and with the Catholic

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248 Coronil, 1997: 204.
Church. On the 21st of January a revolutionary general strike was initiated and, despite the weakening effects that the repression had had on the union movement, masses of workers protested together with students. After two days of street clashes with the police and military forces, and accompanied by church bells and the sirens of the empty factories, the dictator fled Venezuela with some of his closest allies and a considerable amount of money.250


All transitions to democracy are negotiated, some with representatives of the old regime and some only among the pro-democratic forces seeking to form a new system. Negotiations are not always needed to extricate the society from the authoritarian regime, but they are necessary to constitute democratic institutions. Democracy cannot be dictated; it emerges from bargaining. 251

After the overthrow of the Pérez Jiménez regime, the presidential candidates of three major political parties – AD, COPEI and URD – signed an agreement called the Punto Fijo Pact, on the foundations of the democratic government program, which also included the organizing of a coalition government with the three parties represented. The pact got its name from the place where it was closed, in the summerhouse of COPEI leader Rafael Caldera in the town of Punto Fijo. The pact and the town later also gave birth to a synonym for the Venezuelan political system since 1958 and to partyarchy: puntofijismo. In 1958-59 the three parties also agreed upon the distribution of the cabinet posts: AD would have two ministries and COPEI and URD three each. The rest of the ministerial posts would go to independent candidates. Further, the parties divided important key posts such as directorates of State institutions and also the posts of state governors.


The apparent minority position of AD in the cabinet is explained on two grounds: first, President Betancourt was counted as AD’s third representative, and second, most of the “independent” ministers were in fact friends of AD and Betancourt.²⁵²

The Punto Fijo Pact also included an agreement between the parties and the most important interest groups in Venezuelan society: the Catholic Church, the Armed Forces, the Federal Chamber of Industry and Commerce (Fedecámaras) and, finally, the main national union confederation (the CTV). The basic contents of the pact can be summarized in three agreements:

a) To respect electoral results and for all political organizations to defend the constitutional authority,

b) To have a government of national unity and to avoid a systematic opposition that could weaken the democratic movement, and

c) To have a minimum political program in common.²⁵³

The first agreement corresponds partly to respect for the democratic system. But the other two agreements can be said to represent not only the intention to avoid the arising of a new authoritarian regime, but also the exclusion of the Venezuelan Communist Party, the PCV. The pact thus included not only an anti-dictatorial program, but also a strong anti-Communist strategy to keep these former allies, the PCV, out of government. Several leaders of the student organizations (including those related to AD) questioned the pact on the grounds of its exclusion of the PCV. Leftist clandestine and armed opposition, coup attempts, and initial party system fragmentation characterized the political development during the early1960’s. Daniel Levine presents some interesting facts related to the inclusion of the Catholic Church in the Punto Fijo Pact. The relationship between AD and the Church was far from conflict-free, and COPEI here served as facilitators of a better understanding between the two. As an illustration of the good will of the Punto Fijo politicians towards the Church, State subsidies to the Church tripled from 1957-58 to 1958-59.²⁵⁴ In fact, Betancourt felt deep respect for Caldera and reasoned that COPEI’s Christian democratic ideology and AD’s

²⁵² Alexander, 1964: 73.
social democracy could be mutually reinforcing. AD thus needed COPEI in the project to institutionalize the Punto Fijo democratic model.255

Recalling the quotation from Przeworski that introduced this section, this kind of pact making in a democratization process is far from unique to Venezuela. The system of pact making between interest groups has been termed “broadly corporatist, with varying overlays of pluralism.” The Venezuelan case shares characteristics with Colombia and Costa Rica, for example, but Venezuela is by far the most corporatistic.256 The political actors that took most advantage of the Punto Fijo Pact were AD and COPEI. The URD, more populist and personalistic than AD and COPEI, was Venezuela’s second party in 1958 in electoral figures. But URD withdrew quite early from the alliance and shrank in political importance. One of the basic ideas of the Punto Fijo Pact was the incorporation of organized labor, structured around the AD and COPEI parties. Margarita López Maya and Luis Gómez Calcaño argue that a major purpose of the State apparatus that evolved in Venezuela from 1958 was to reinforce the unionism related to these two parties.257

The ideological base and the political program of the AD party had been structured during the 1940’s and 50’s. John Martz has studied the birth and the first years of AD’s evolution and states that AD discussed the labor movement within a broader context in terms of an alliance of classes fighting for the democratic revolution. The role of the State should be to have superior control of the national economy, not necessarily with the nationalization of industries, but with careful governmental guidance. A party with the capacity to blend the interests of diverse groups was thus required.258 Therefore for AD, labor signified a great possibility for social control at the local level, which also implied the necessity of workers’ representation in the party, from the base level to its highest organ, the National Executive Commission (Comité Ejecutivo Nacional).259

256 Lijphart, 1999: 179.
257 López Maya & Gómez Calcaño, 1989: 139.
258 Martz, 1966: 236.
259 Ellner, 1993 a: 98-99. The fundamental labor policy of AD is defined in the party’s Labor Thesis (Tesís Sindical) of 1958, in which, among other things, it is stated that “the working class has to prepare itself for the {future} management of the economy” and, as quoted by economic historian Steve Ellner, “one of our [AD workers’] underlying tasks is to educate
nation’s unionism was thus incorporated into the State through the parties. This is nothing particularly unique to Venezuela, however. Collier and Collier have studied the evolution of State-labor relationships in eight Latin American countries, and all of them present a phase of incorporation of labor.\(^{260}\) Patterns similar to the AD control over labor have characterized the APRA (often mentioned as a sister party of AD) of Peru, and even more, the Argentine Peronist Party (*Partido Justicialista*), the latter periodically in a situation of complete monopolistic status.\(^{261}\)

It is worth remarking that the parties grew strong when the economic and social character of Venezuela (and Latin America) was still quite rural. The rapid urbanization and industrialization would be a strongly contributing factor in the later crisis of the parties. These processes would later bring forward an urgent need to adapt the party model to the new social and economic situation of the 1980’s and 90’s. The experiences of the *trienio* (1945-48) led Betancourt and AD to reconsider the strategy of the democratic project. The importance of strong political parties as a fundamental condition for a democratic society was unquestioned within AD. But the ability to seek consensus and compromises in order to reach a smooth consolidation of democracy was also decisive. Levine enumerates the challenges that AD stood before in 1958:

As understood by the political elite, then, the lessons of the *trienio* and of the subsequent decade of military rule were that conciliation, compromise and prudence were both necessary and desirable if a decent, durable political order were to be constructed. After 1958, these lessons were put into effect in five interrelated ways which can be summarized as follows: (1) pacts and coalitions; (2) inter-elite consensus; (3) program limitation; (4) encouragement of participation, but controlled and channelled; and (5) exclusion of the revolutionary left.\(^{262}\)

Besides the incorporation of labor and peasants, AD sought and established other alliances. Betancourt carried through appreciated reforms in the Armed Forces, in this way investing in military loyalties. Further, good relations were maintained with the press, particularly with the daily newspaper

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261 See, for example: Coppedge, 2001 a: 197.
262 In Crisp, 1997: 173.
In fact, Betancourt frequently said, “Those who do not read Ultimas Noticias are poorly informed” (Los que no leen Ultimas Noticias están mal informados).263

Initially, and especially until 1958-59, Acción Democrática was an anti-imperialistic and socialist party. But within the first decade of the newly installed democracy, the party would split twice, in 1963 and 1967, which led to the formation of the MIR (Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionario) and MEP (Movimiento Electoral del Pueblo) parties, both of which were politically to the left of Acción Democrática. Regarding the formation of MEP, the AD control over the CTV was for the first and only time seriously threatened due to this division. MEP counted among its members ex-adecos (AD militants), who included a majority of the AD trade union leaders. It was this division and internal crisis that also helped Rafael Caldera and COPEI to win the presidential elections for the period of 1969 to 1973.264 Whereas AD followed a social democratic doctrine directed mainly at the lower middle class, abandoning its former, more Leftist traits, COPEI emphasized social justice and focused on business sectors and the urban middle class.265 The conflictive traits of the period did not mark AD alone with lack of internal unity and party splits. The political system as a whole was also characterized by conflicts, guerrilla warfare, attempted coups d’état, and attacks on the government from the Left and the Right. In fact, the Betancourt government was to be remembered as the most conflictive of Venezuela’s contemporary political history266 (at least until the government of Hugo Chávez from 1999 onwards).

The Ripening Phase

With regard to the modern democratic era in Venezuela, some analysts hold that the establishment of democracy was reached thanks to the party-State model and the centralism of the State. The Constitution of 1961 is referred to as the basis of the federal but centralized party State. The Constitution holds, for instance, that the governors should be nominated and removed by the president, that is, with concentrated and centralized control. Until 1989 and the introduction of decentralization reforms, this disposition was valid and

263 Palacios, interview, Stockholm, 16 March 2003.
reinforced political and administrative centralism. In the Constitution of 1961 the second article reads that:

The Republic of Venezuela is a federal State in the terms sanctioned by this Constitution.

Regarding the political status of the regional states, the 16th article declares that:

The states are autonomous and equal as political entities. They are compelled to maintain the independency and the integrity of the Nation; and to accomplish and fulfill the Constitution and the Laws of the Republic.267

The 1961 Constitution anticipated the federal structure of the State, including a deepening of democracy through the activation of the lower levels of government. However, centralism was maintained due to fear of Leftist and military upheavals. But the Congress was constitutionally authorized to pass legislation that in practice implemented decentralization of certain sectors (art.137 of the 1961 Constitution) and the reorganization of municipal governments (art. 26).268 Many of the ambitions to establish a more decentralized democratic system (as planned during the framing of the Constitution) were postponed for decades, though, as will be described in the first chapter on decentralization.

The results of the elections of 1968 and the victory of Rafael Caldera and COPEI created a new situation for Acción Democrática. For the first time, the party did not control the national executive power, although AD obtained a majority in Congress as well as in the regional state legislative assemblies and in municipal councils. One important factor behind the COPEI victory was the division of AD, in which the more Leftist faction formed the MEP party (Movimiento Electoral del Pueblo). If we survey the different regional states in this presidential election, which partly runs counter to the results of the elections for Congressional representation and seats in the regional state legislative assemblies and the municipal councils, COPEI won in eleven and AD only

267 Constitución de la República de Venezuela, 1961.
268 Ellner, 1999 b.
in eight. Donald Herman suggests that COPEI experienced a maturing phase as a party during the period of 1952-68, influenced by the struggle of AD and the first decade of democratic *adeco* administration. The attitude towards AD changed during the period, and Herman proposes that this alteration became decisive for the strengthening of Venezuelan democracy. COPEI moved towards the center of the political spectrum during the period and abandoned some of its more conservative traditional trademarks. Still, besides an academic elite, business sectors and the Catholic Church remained the most notable allies of COPEI, although the role of Opus Dei changed into more of a discreet shadow institution behind the party.

However, once in national executive power, COPEI had not “matured enough” to approach AD and possibly offer it a few cabinet seats. In the general COPEI euphoria, the party decided to form a government consisting only of *copeyanos* and a few independents. The AD domination in Congress led COPEI to form an alliance with MEP and FDP (*Fuerza Democrática Popular*), and in this way COPEI managed to obtain the presidency of the Congress, diplomatically given to a party-independent deputy. These measures notwithstanding, the first year of COPEI government showed few advances; each political bloc blamed the other for the lack of legislation. However, by 1970 the parties re-initiated negotiations in order to reach agreements. As Herman concludes, “The effective functioning of political democracy in Venezuela required at least minimal AD-COPEI cooperation.”

During the Caldera government (1968-1973), a “regionalization” process was initiated that included a territorial division of administration development planning and policy implementation. This regionalization process can be considered an ambition to deconcentrate government to achieve better efficiency in the regions and likewise, a point of departure for the deeper decentralization initiated in the late 1980’s. Even if a great many of the policies of the Caldera regionalization have disappeared (and would be theoretically classified rather as *deconcentration*), the period does indeed constitute a certain basis for the eventual decentralization process. The

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269 Herman, 1980: 67.
270 Ibid.: 111-112.
Regional Corporations of Development that were created during the period still exist and function.271

Historically, the regional state governments had been small bureaucratic entities until the early 20th century. Until the 1930’s, the governorships dedicated their main effort to resolving internal security problems and carrying out infrastructure projects in the region. There was scarcely any pressure for delivery of services to the population, particularly not in rural areas, where the majority was still illiterate. It was first in the mid-1940’s (with the first AD government), with the growth of the Venezuelan “Social State,”272 that regional governments, one can argue, showed a qualitative leap in the size of the executive and the structure of the bureaucracy.

By way of comparison, in the beginning of the century regional governments consisted of an average of forty employees per government. In the 1950’s these institutions had become more complex, with an average of 1,000 employees per regional government. The area of responsibilities had also expanded and covered education, public and social assistance, support of public, urban works, culture and health care. Furthermore, the regional state governments came to be in charge of security and control of the territory. In the following decades the number of functionaries in the state governments would continue to expand, reaching an average of 13,000 persons employed per government in 1989 (and even reaching 30-40,000 in the state of Zulia and the Federal District of Caracas). Long before decentralization in 1989, the state governments had developed into complex bureaucratic institutions with internal division of labor and topic, and specialized departments for each area of responsibility (culture, education, public works, etc.).273

271 Guerón & Manchisi, 1996: 356, 359. The most important (and well-planned) of these Regional Corporations has without doubt been that in Guayana (Bolivar state), “Corporación Regional de Guayana”, which would become an important actor in the trade union activities in the state-owned steel industry.


The Venezuelan Two-Party System

Labor and peasant leaders, and people in the more recently formed professional associations, have always been subject to party discipline: Failure to comply with the instructions of one’s political party usually results in expulsion. Because the interest-group members also belong to the same disciplined, mass-based parties, expulsion from the party usually entails loss of leadership within the interest-group organization.274

The obscure fusion of party/union leadership is an illustrative trait and core of the Venezuelan political system. Moreover, in order to facilitate and smooth the relationship between the State, labor and the parties), the AD labor deputies in Congress are often the same persons as the leaders of the party’s labor bureau and the executive secretaries of the CTV.275 This feature, though, is shared by the other larger political parties. López Maya describes the relationship as follows: “The CTV, or the adeco unionism...depends on Acción Democrática, but within Acción Democrática, unionism is a force and there it has a powerful faction and, above all, it did in the 70’s and the 80’s.”276 It is both remarkable and illustrative that the CTV is equated with AD unionism (sindicalismo adeco).

To understand the traditional AD influence on the Venezuelan labor union movement, we have to emphasize the organization of the party. AD has numbered many members, all over the country, and it has disposed an advanced level of social control. In every little village there is an AD office. In a classic of 1966, John Martz described AD and the pyramidal structure of the party, including how it functions on the regional and local levels. On the national level, four organs head the party: the National Convention, the National Directory Committee (CDN), the Executive National Committee (CEN) and the National Disciplinary Tribunal (TDN) (mentioned in order

274 Myers, 1990: 304.
276 López Maya, interview, Caracas, 15 July 1997.
of importance). On the regional level, AD has Sectional Conventions, Executive Committees, and Disciplinary Tribunals in all states. Each sectional executive includes a Political Bureau that is in charge of the decision-making in political matters. Further down the pyramid are the party bodies at the district or county level, followed by the municipal and finally the local levels. On the last two levels, the party organization depends on the size of the entity. At the municipal level, an assembly provides debate and discussions on legislative matters. The local level organization consists of party base groups, which include a local assembly, a local committee and a local Junta. The local party bodies receive political recommendations and are checked by the regional ones, which make sure that the local party representation fulfills the party directives from above.

The high degree of State and government centralization has deeply marked the structure and functioning of the political parties (something that would later be a highly decisive factor in the eventual decentralization process). Typical for Venezuelan politics is that the two traditional parties, AD and COPEI, can be characterized as multi-class parties, both highly centralized and bureaucratic. They adopted a Leninist type of centralized organization. This model meant that regional and local institutions depended on the central government for funding and appointments. The Leninist nature of the party, as described by Levine and Crisp, indicates “the all-comprising penetration and control of organized social life that characterizes modern mass parties in Venezuela.” AD founder Betancourt publicly expressed on various occasions the influence Lenin had had on his political project (especially in his youth) with regard to the structure and hierarchy of a sustainable and strong political party. Venezuelan philosopher and political scientist Alberto Arvelo Ramos demonstrates that COPEI (with all its cells, apparatus, committees and mastodon bureaucracy) is just as Leninist as AD, in judicial, institutional and financial fundamentals. These arrangements protect and form the basis of the party, as well as the overall party structure.

COPEI accordingly has a very AD-like organization and structure, but AD has traditionally had a broader and deeper base in society. With regard to the centralist traits of the parties, COPEI has traditionally had an even

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greater centralist and personalistic nature as a party than AD. On the whole, though, AD and COPEI have developed into being more and more alike as political parties. In terms of national government, Venezuelan citizens have frequently commented that “the thing that’s most similar to an adeco government is a copeyano government” (Lo más parecido a un gobierno adeco es un gobierno copeyano). Going back to Sartori and the dangers associated with too little issue differentiation for aligned parties, the eventual crisis of the AD-COPEI puntofijista model did indeed display these symptoms, which would be instrumental in explaining – although not totally – the increased lack of credibility of politicians from these two parties. A common metaphor among Venezuelans concerning the same situation is the reference to AD and COPEI as the Guanabana, a tasty tropical fruit with white pulp and green shell, which is the colors of AD (white) and COPEI (green), indicating the national political power. Even if COPEI is governing, adecos still remain in the administration and on commissions (green peel, white pulp).

**Venezuelan Presidential Partyarchy in Comparison**

Summing up, partyarchy can be a short-run asset to political leaders dealing with crisis, but both partyarchy and presidentialism, and especially the combination of the two, tend to generate more crises, escalate their severity, and, in the long run, undermine the usefulness of partyarchic control for crisis management.

Venezuelan partyarchy is further interesting due to the fact that it was rooted in a presidential system, which makes Venezuelan partyarchy something of an exception, considering that political parties tend to be relatively weak in presidential systems. In Latin America, most democratic partyarchies have tended to be parliamentary, as in the cases of Costa Rica and Chile. Regarding this relationship between presidentialism and partyarchy, a comparison with the Brazilian party system is most interesting. One major characteristic of the Venezuelan traditional parties until recently has been the strong party discipline. This has meant that the president has been able to count on the loyal support of the party, especially when it is in a majority position in government, whereas the multiplicity of

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281 Coppedge, 1994 a: 162.
282 Ibid.: 17.
undisciplined parties in the parliament can create obstacles for Brazilian presidents.\textsuperscript{283} In the Brazilian case, however, this situation derives not merely from lack of party discipline, but also because historically, Brazil has presented an overall more fragmented multi-party system.

Another important factor to consider in the relationship between presidentialism and the party system is that a presidential system based on plurality can be an important factor in the development of a party system. This can be traced to the fact that it creates pressure to concentrate the votes in a small number of parties, and finally in two party options. Most often, a spill-over effect from the presidential to the parliamentary elections can be observed, particularly when the elections are held simultaneously.\textsuperscript{284} In contrast to the two-round (\textit{doble vuelta}) presidential electoral system of several Latin American countries, the Venezuelan system signifies that the electorate has only one opportunity to decide its preference. As Venezuelan political scientists José Molina and Carmen Pérez point out, the two-round system does not provoke the concentration of a two-party system, since the electorate vote for their preferred party in the first round to increase the party’s negotiating power before the second round. There is no concentration of presidential votes in the first round, and consequently the parliamentary votes are not proportionally concentrated.\textsuperscript{285}

In Venezuela, as in a majority of the Latin American nations, the presidential and parliamentary elections are held at the same time. The presidential ballot is popularly called the \textit{voto grande} (big vote), while the parliamentary \textit{planchas} or slates (closed party lists) are labeled \textit{voto pequeño} (small vote), illustrating the perception among citizens of the executive’s superior position. Since the presidential elections dominate public opinion, this system has far-reaching implications even in the legislature. Although vote splitting has increased since the 1990’s, normally the voter gives the same party his or her vote for president and representation in Congress.\textsuperscript{286}

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{283} Crisp, 1997: 160.
\item \textsuperscript{285} Molina & Pérez, 1998: 4.
\item \textsuperscript{286} Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Returning to Rae’s quantitative definitions of the requisites of a two-party system, the Venezuelan AD-COPEI partyarchy qualifies under the second condition, that neither of the two parties obtained 70 percent of the votes. However, the first condition concerning the 90 percent of the total electoral support has been accomplished on only one occasion (the election of 1988).\(^{287}\) A number of scholars have classified Venezuela as something between a two-party and a two-and-a-half party system. The main argument for this classification has been the existence of a number of smaller parties (like URD and PCV initially and MAS since the 1980’s) that together managed to capture more than 10 percent of the total votes in presidential elections between 1958 and 1983. The Venezuelan two-party system has also been compared with that of Colombia, but at least until the 1980’s, some distinctions were rather palpable. In Colombia, the two strong parties (Liberals and Conservatives) have been characterized by a higher level of factionalism than the Venezuelan bi-partyism of AD and COPEI (without denying this trait in the Venezuelan case). The result in Colombia has then been something that resembles multi-partyism, with only two parties (but split into factions).\(^{288}\)

**Partyarchy and Power Concentration**

The forty year long electoral dominance of AD and COPEI was not based on their ability to effectively compete in the political market. On the contrary, their hegemony was maintained by their negation of meaningful competition and through the imposition of obstacles to political reform.\(^{289}\)

Nevertheless, as George Philip shows, even initially strong party systems can be vulnerable to the withdrawal of public respect in a situation where the political elite evidently seems to be allowed to get away with breaking the law. For Philip, this is due to the fact that doubt concerning the democratic contestation in itself does not have control enough to exercise power without responsibility. Furthermore, he suggests that the “checks-and-balances” political system might sometimes be worse than the “winner-takes-all” model. In a “winner-takes-all” system, disappointed voters can

\(^{287}\) In Molina & Pérez, 1998: 11-12.

\(^{288}\) See, for example: Lijphart, 1999: 72. From the 1980’s onwards, though, the factionalism within AD and COPEI has contributed to deeper and more decisive repercussions in the party system.

\(^{289}\) Buxton, 2000: 3.
repudiate a sitting government via the electoral process, without undermining the entire political system.  

If we now go back to the concept of delegative democracy and the *decretismo* style of legislation in Latin America, in practice the constitutions of several countries permit such a process of delegation to the president. First, though, the power of decree has to be approved in Congress, with a specification of which areas and for what (limited) period of time the legislation would allow the chief executive the power of decree. This *decretismo* tradition of overriding Congress has been manifest in Chile, Colombia and Peru, but as Shugart and Carey note, in no place to the degree that Venezuelan presidents have enjoyed extra-ordinary powers. Other factors that contribute to understanding the two-party hegemony are found in the electoral system that has facilitated the continuation of the political dominance of AD and COPEI. The system of closed bloc lists for legislative elections meant that the Venezuelan voters, with only one tick, chose a political party that consequently decided the nomination of all legislative tiers, from the neighborhood level to the National Congress.

Peeler considers that the Venezuelan two-party system had become so effective in the mobilization of the electorate and the production of functioning democratic governments that it eventually provoked a backlash that undermined it. The hyper-centralization of the system and the institutionalization of the two major parties became a major obstacle to the deepening of democracy, since it included resistance to initiatives from below and prevented the emergence of alternative political forces. Similarly, Buxton refers to studies from the early 1970’s that revealed that the Venezuelan partyarchy was not as stable or legitimate as it seemed. Already then, influential surveys showed a lack of confidence in politicians among the Venezuelans. Among other things, 70 percent of the respondents agreed that the only concern of the typical Venezuelan politician was winning elections. Further, 81 percent saw the political parties merely as instruments of “powerful minorities.” The top party leaders were not unaware of these sentiments. Self-criticism of the hierarchical system

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293 Buxton, 2000: 5. Buxton bases these findings on a study made by John Martz and Enrique Baloyra in the mid 1970’s (Martz & Baloyra, 1976).
within AD has existed almost since the party’s foundation, from the base level to the national party cúpula. In an interview in 1978, top intellectual adeco leader Gonzalo Barrios said:

The solution is to be found within the political parties. They ought to assume more responsibly the task of candidate selections. In AD we have given instructions and we carry through internal discussions about the base level and that we need to be more severe in the selection of the candidatures of Senators, Deputies and Councilmen. We have already made a forceful auto-critique in this sense and we recognize that the Venezuelan political parties have not had a suiting system of selections of these posts.294

Another predominant tendency among scholars to explain the relatively successful development of Venezuelan democracy (often in combination with the ideas of pacted democracy) is traced directly to the oil wealth of the nation.295 As long as the oil incomes were sufficient to satisfy the most important societal sectors, the Punto Fijo model would survive. But as became apparent in the 1980’s and 90’s, with a decline in oil prices on the world market the model of pacted democracy would lose popular support and legitimacy. After the oil bonanza years of the 1970’s, the economic deterioration worsened throughout the 1980’s. For the Venezuelan population, the first drastic blow came with the COPEI government of Luis Herrera Campíns. On the 18th of February 1983, remembered as Black Friday, a heavy devaluation of the currency was launched.296 The devaluation likewise impacted negatively on the clientelistic networks of AD and COPEI, contributing overall to deepened discontent among the citizens with the traditional political leadership.

Party System and Clientelism

In Venezuela, much more than in Mexico, the whole process of public administration was overlaid by party politics. The authoritarian system in Mexico, in which the official party was dependent on the government, kept this process somewhat in check, but the Venezuelan pattern, in which the dominant parties acted as patronage machines, exacerbated it.297

295 Karl, 1997; Coronil, 1997; Levine, 1989; Martín Castellano, 2001.
297 Philip, 2003: 47.
In a Latin American context, Venezuelan democracy was considered to function extremely well, particularly until the 1980’s, when many of the neighboring countries were democratized and the Venezuelan economic crisis occurred. Venezuelan democracy fulfilled the procedural requirements of a democratic system, but the reality was something else. Mexico is probably the only other Latin American country that can be compared to Venezuela in terms of high-level political appointments, but in practice, the Mexican PRI party was in power alone until 2000. Despite the democratic existence of alternations in power and competitive elections, the Venezuelan presidentialism has been almost as strong as the Mexican. The appointments of the governors and the bureaucracy around them between 1958 and 1988 are only some examples. Philip demonstrates that in the early 1990’s, of the existing 417,000 public officials, about 9,000 were high-level political appointees. Of the latter it can be assumed that a rather high number of them did not do much more than receive a salary. The most crucial and powerful of the Venezuelan State institutions in this context of clientelism and corruption is without doubt the judiciary apparatus, heavily dominated by the two traditional parties.

The Venezuelan Judicial Power has terminal cancer. The totality of its structure is atrophied by partyarchy, mediocrity and corruption. The finger nomination, or the customary concourses, is a chain reaction the principal core of which is the cogollo [top leadership clique] of the parties that have spread the concept according to Punto Fijo, through which they distributed and alternated the power in reciprocal form, two or three political forces. On all levels and in all instances.

Though AD and COPEI still controlled the national political scene and State institutions, the party system and the role of the parties had been changing since the early 1980’s. Both parties came under constant criticism. Reforms were proposed and implemented in order to change the structures, campaigning, financing, and so forth of the political parties, of which the most far-reaching would be the decentralization reforms that were

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298 Ibid. The total number of public employees in Venezuela is calculated to 1,360,169 for the year 2002, according to the National Institute of Statistics (García Ponce, 2004: 23).

299 Ojeda, 1995: 139. Sociologist and journalist William Ojeda became well known to Venezuelans through his book on the corruption within the judicial institutions, ¿Cuánto vale un juez? (How Much for a Judge?) was the title and Ojeda spent over a year in prison for the delicate contents of the book.
implemented in 1989 as described in the following chapter on decentralization. Political clientelism has indeed existed in Venezuela (or, to put it better, has often been the norm). Rómulo Betancourt, like other Latin American populists of the time, was officially a sworn life-long enemy of corruption. Cleaning up State institutions and fighting corruption were permanent topics in his political discourse. Nevertheless, the vices of corruption, clientelism, nepotism and the like grew deep also within the AD and COPEI parties, which had previously been identified mainly with their struggle against the dictatorship. Julia Buxton describes quite clearly how the two traditional Venezuelan parties reached and maintained their hegemonic position within the State, politics and society:

The ability of AD and COPEI to delimit political challenges and their domination to do so, was linked to the oil economy. Petrodollars financed the creation of a paternalist state that was wealthy enough to meet the employment, consumption and investment needs of all Venezuelan society. This in turn facilitated the maintenance of the political consensus embedded in the Pact of Punto Fijo. As the brokers between the state and society, AD and COPEI were able to provide jobs, high wages, credit and subsidies to all classes. Any competition threatened to arrest their privileged access to the oil revenue and their subjective distributionary capabilities. Competition in this respect should be defined in the broadest possible sense. It relates not only to groups external to AD and COPEI but also factions within the parties.300

In the processes of selecting the working force for the big industries in Venezuela, one industrial manager reveals, the normal thing to do when additional workers were needed was to call the local AD and COPEI offices to offer them each half of the positions.301 This aspect of clientelistic behavior concentrated around the two traditional parties likewise illustrates the mutual importance of allies in society, in this case between the parties and business sectors. Donald Herman provides an interesting perspective on the clientelistic phenomenon. As he argues, patronage is not much of a problem when a party does not control the executive. For instance, during the first COPEI government of Caldera, AD still controlled positions available to distribute among the party’s followers, as COPEI had during the Betancourt mandate. But when the party wins an election, as COPEI did in 1968, the expectations of rewarding increase among the militants.302

302 Herman, 1980: 127.
The economic and societal detriments caused by clientelistic behavior are far-reaching and multidimensional. Corruption and political clientelism not only block the least privileged people in a society from all opportunities to attain social and economic improvements, but these cultural traditions also encourage inflation, and politically they contribute to credibility crises and the gradual undermining of the entire political system by decreasing its legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. As Sidney Tarrow concludes in his study of political entrepreneurship and clientelism in Italy and France, the costs of clientelistic traditions are not only national but are also counterproductive at the local level. Clientelism as a system is unpredictable and irrational by nature, due to the fact that it mixes political preferences with more concrete and objective factors such as location of public works, distribution of job opportunities, and so on. Furthermore, clientelism signifies that collective projects and pursuits are excluded in favor of more individualistic benefits.303

Likewise, in a long-term perspective the efficiency of political organizations and institutions is likely to be extremely low, since party members and leaders enter principally to gain the economic and social privileges linked to the political affiliation. Political leaders, such as mayors, will consequently spend much time and effort keeping the necessary contact persons in the clientelistic network satisfied.304 Some brief words on the Venezuelan judicial system merit emphasis here. The Supreme Court is nominally independent, but in practice it is highly politicized and undermined by systematic corruption and clientelism embedded in the entire political system. On the clientelistic behavior of AD and COPEI, Michael Coppedge concludes that:

The pervasive clientelism in Venezuelan society further undermines the legitimacy of the parties as mediators between citizens and government. If parties were concerned exclusively with matters of policy and strategy, it would be difficult to question their motives. But when leaders abuse public resources to reward their supporters and enrich themselves and sacrifice their own ideals (or avoid having ideals to begin with) to make sure they are on the winning side of a factional dispute, their motives become suspect. Some degree of clientelism exists wherever politicians do favors for their friends, but it is more prevalent in Latin America, and certainly in Venezuela, where oil-financed

303 Tarrow, 1977: 197-200.
304 Ibid.
surpluses made the exchange of selective benefits for political support an irresistible temptation for many years.\textsuperscript{305}

Since democratization in 1958, as historian Fernando Coronil describes in \textit{The Magical State}, the appearance of repeated public scandals created a feeling of agitation and change. However, since the cases of corruption remained unsolved (despite the scandals), this feeling became superficial, contrasting proportionally to the deeper perception of a familiar reality, which, according to Coronil, seemed not only unchanging but unchangeable. The powerful people rarely ended up in jail; rather they remained powerful, rich, and admired for their ability to defend and preserve their position and assets. As a Venezuelan journalist put it during the process of trials on one scandal in the late 1970’s, “In Venezuela only people who are fools (\textit{pendejos}), or broke, go to jail. Clever people (\textit{vivos}) never do.”\textsuperscript{306}

\section*{Attenuated Bi-Partyism}

Ever since the student mobilizations during the dictatorship of Gómez, other Leftist parties than AD have existed; during the 1940’s the Communist Party competed with AD, particularly in the trade union arena. But after its exclusion from the political pact in 1958, the PCV never recovered its previous strength. However, “new” Leftist parties have developed from the party splits, as will be described in subsequent sections. In a recent study, Molina develops the characteristics of the different periods of the Venezuelan political system, establishing the maximum level of institutionalization of AD and COPEI (i.e., of partyarchy) between 1973 and 1992. Similarly, for Molina, the party system could not be classified as polarized before 1993.\textsuperscript{307} Nonetheless, the evolution of the two most salient Left-wing parties of the period – MAS and Causa R – is worth an analytical review because of their importance in the forthcoming chapter on the transformations of the party system in the midst of decentralization.

\textsuperscript{305} Coppedge, 1994 a: 177.
\textsuperscript{306} Coronil, 1997: 358.
\textsuperscript{307} Molina, 2002: 4.
MAS (Movement Towards Socialism)

After peace was made between the government and the guerrilla opposition in 1968, which included the legitimization of the PCV, the party was strongly divided, in both generational and ideological terms. The younger faction was led by Teodoro Petkoff, and it criticized the socialist approach of the hard-line Communists in the party. Before the final split in 1971, the heaviest debate was about internal party democracy, during which the hard-liners almost expelled Petkoff from the party. Eventually, the Teodoro faction protested with a parallel party congress in early 1971, and shortly afterwards the MAS party was formed, appealing also to important groups and leaders from the PCV trade union organizations.  

Many of the party’s leaders had a past as guerrilla fighters in the armed struggles of the 1960’s. The idea with the party’s formation was to create a different political organization than the traditional Leninist party structure: “A party that not should be only that, but more: A movement of movements.” Nevertheless, MAS soon developed into a party structure with Leninist features similar to AD and COPEI. Political scientist Enrique Andara refers to MAS as a “mini-AD” with regard to its structure and decision-making procedures.  

Compared with the images of AD and COPEI (and the PCV), the MAS party has often emphasized its youthfulness, both in members and political messages. The initial socialist ideology was gradually abandoned during the 1970’s and the party moved rightwards like AD. Nonetheless, the party’s anti-capitalist approach remained during the decade. Steve Ellner is probably the scholar who has most carefully studied the evolution of the modern Venezuelan party system, and particularly the development of MAS. Ellner underlines the strategy used by MAS to form alliances with parties more to the right, both in electoral pacts and as critical supporters of the government. During the CAP government between 1974 and 1978, MAS supported the emergency powers for the president in order to implement some of the popular (here, = populist) measures that the

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308 Ellner, 1986: 82-87.
increased oil-income permitted. For Ellner, the MAS rationale for occasionally giving limited support to the government can be summarized in five conclusions:

a) MAS aspires to stand out from the traditional image of Leftist parties, i.e., the tradition of exaggerated criticism and opposition.

b) MAS expects electoral gains by supporting popular measures, thus creating identification with the popular mood.

c) MAS considers it reasonable to win over members from AD and COPEI, especially on the grassroots level, using strategic alliances with the larger parties and thus creating the image of MAS as an ally.

d) Through the mutual understanding between MAS and AD or COPEI respectively, the bigger parties presumably realize that MAS differs from other Leftist parties, thus contributing to a possible strengthening of the party’s legitimacy among more citizens.

e) MAS support of an AD or COPEI majority in Congress, state legislatures or municipal councils contributes to making these political bodies more “capable of governing,” compared to the traditional inability of one party alone to pass legislation.

Whereas the first conclusion illustrates the willingness on the part of MAS to be a party that is easy to deal with, the second is almost a complete recognition of being populist. The third, fourth and fifth conclusions are interesting to contemplate through the analytical lenses of party system theories, as presented by Sartori and Ramos Jiménez in the first theoretical chapter. In practice, MAS accepts its role as “the half supporting party” of the Venezuelan AD-COPEI two-party system.

From the time of its formation, participation on the base levels and demands for political, administrative and fiscal decentralization have characterized the party. In the textile industry of Aragua, the workers’ struggles were initiated in the mid-70’s. The origin of these shop-floor protests was that the disproportionate profits of the companies, despite antiquated technology, were not invested in the industry. Furthermore, considering the industry’s problems, most labor union leaders seem to agree that the companies exaggerated the crisis in order to legitimize the mass dismissals by referring

312 Ibid.
to economic circumstances. In 1977 and 1980, two important strikes were carried out in the textile industry. During these years, the AD party lost its earlier dominance among the textile workers; in Aragua the MAS party and a group of other, ultra-Leftist, groups advanced significantly. A leading MAS textile unionist and Congress deputy of the period, José Torres (a.k.a. Camastrón), describes how they managed to break the earlier dominance of the adecos within the industry. Earlier, AD, often in alliance with MEP, had been dominating through CTV intervention in the unions and dismissal of inconvenient union activists, for example, such as he experienced himself in the early 1970’s. Speaking of MAS activities in Aragua since its birth in 1971, Camastrón argues that the union and party activities are impossible to detach from each other.

The displacement of the AD union domination in Aragua was achieved through massive efforts by different forces, including both Leftist parties and the more right-wing COPEI. Eloy Torres, one of the most prominent MAS leaders since its formation, and former labor secretary of the PCV, recalls that when the party was being formed in the early 1970’s a lot of young ex-Communists were working with him in Aragua. Among them was Carlos Tablante (who would be governor of Aragua between 1989 and 1995). Torres remarks that Aragua was always a stronghold of MAS through their struggle, for instance, in the textile industry, which also led to the creation of a political profile, “because there we worked for the future.” It was therefore also in Aragua that the party won its first governorship in 1989. Eloy Torres thus seems to agree that the future successes of MAS in the regional and local elections stemmed from political and unionist activities of the early 1970’s. Tablante was among the co-founders of MAS-Aragua. These experiences would work in his and the party’s favor from 1989 onwards. MAS apparently exerted conscious pressure and made demands for decentralized political leadership.

One can assume that already in the 1970’s the party saw that the centralized model prevented smaller parties from gaining entrance to the political and

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314 Torres, interview, Maracay, 19 July 1997.
315 Ibid.
316 Torres, interview, Maracay, 19 July 1997; Solano, interview, Maracay, 28 May 1997.
317 Guía & Torres, 1996: 285-289. Eloy Torres left the PCV in 1971 and was elected deputy of Congress for Aragua in 1973 (even though he is from Caracas).
State arenas. If we remain briefly in the MAS inter-sector relationships, besides the unionists, the party numbered among its allies university students, intellectuals, and periodically certain business sectors as well. Practically all of the Venezuelan Left-wing and centrist intellectuals and cultural personalities were at one time or another active in MAS during these years. As many Venezuelans still remember, MAS was the fashion party: “I was in it, like the whole world.”

Closer to election dates, though, many decided to vote for either AD or COPEI. Theoretically, this can be interpreted through a re-consideration of the wasted-vote scenario in a strong two-party system.

La Causa Radical

Soon after the formation of MAS, another Leftist party that would contribute to considerable political changes in the 1980’s and 90’s was created. The Radical Cause party –Causa R– (R for Radical is always reversed in the party logo) was founded in the early 1970’s by the ex-guerrilla leader and ex-PCV militant Alfredo Maneiro. Maneiro had previously been a co-founder of MAS but left the party soon after its formation. Originally, the roots of the Causa R movement were put down in two zones, in the unions of the steel industry (SIDOR) in the state of Bolívar, and in the huge Caracas barrio of Catia. Steve Ellner describes how all top Leftist leaders (including MAS) went to Bolívar in 1970-71 to compete for control of the industrial union movement. The group around Maneiro would eventually remain insistent in these pursuits.

Causa R first created its base in Bolívar around a newspaper (El Matancero). The name derives from the industrial suburb of Matanzas in Ciudad Guayana. The founding members of the party lived there in the early 1970’s. The core group behind the newspaper was also named Matancero and included both Pablo Medina and the young electrician Andrés Velásquez, who was recruited to the movement early by Medina.

The state of Bolívar is one of the traditional AD strongholds. Among the reasons for this are that the AD government of President Pérez 1974-79

318 Zapata, interview, Caracas, 18 May 1997; Palacios, interview, Stockholm, 16 March 2003.
nationalized the oil and the iron industries and brought about various beneficial labor reforms, and with clientelistic networks the adecos grew strong in the region. Despite this, Bolívar became the traditional base of Causa R, through the unionism at SIDOR and other industries. In 1974, Velásquez started giving speeches at el Portón, the main gate at SIDOR, where the workers enter and depart by bus between shifts. A main slogan of Causa R in this struggle became: “In SUTISS the political parties have always governed; now it’s time for the workers.”

Through the success of these activities, which also eventually became the trademark of Velásquez, he managed to reach the presidency of SUTISS (the steel workers’ union) at SIDOR in 1979. Two years earlier, Tello Benítez had captured the secretary general post of the union, so in 1979 the Matancero movement had taken over control of SUTISS, one of the strongest and largest unions in Venezuela (about 8,000 unionized workers at the time) and until then traditionally dominated by AD. In spite of this, Causa R did not succeed in getting representation in Fetrametal, the CTV-affiliated industrial federation to which SUTISS belonged. AD managed to maintain its control over Fetrametal through negotiations with the State-owned steel mill SIDOR, where SUTISS was active. The electoral system for representation at higher levels of organized labor, one vote per union, regardless of the union’s size, was a mechanism that helped AD block minority representation.

Political scientist Daniel Hellinger has studied the evolution of Causa R and its unionist activities. He emphasizes that the strategies of Maneiro and the Matancero movement were developed long before the topic of social movements became fashionable. The approaches and visions of Causa R stressed non-institutionalized, collective activities in civil society, rather than the more traditional way of political party preeminence. At mass meetings, invasions of public spaces, protest marches and in the Matancero newspaper, Velasquez and other Causa R activists condemned the corruption of the Venezuelan unionism and political system. Through the activities of the Matancero movement demands were raised for a “New Unionism” (El Nuevo Sindicalismo), which would be the official name of the union movement related to Causa R. In subsequent years, the

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321 Ibid.
323 Hellinger, 1996: 127.
Matanceros within SUTISS struggled for and negotiated over the demand for the forty-hour week, which was rejected by SIDOR, however. In 1981, the federations Fetrametal and Fetabolívar took over SUTISS and replaced the Causa R executive committee of the union with AD and COPEI members. Furthermore, Velásquez, Benítez and other Causa R leaders were fired from the State-owned SIDOR. Velásquez and other Leftist unionists forcefully denounced the intervention, and a group of Causa R members went to Geneva to protest against the intervention before the ILO. Clear elements of repression and exclusion of the Causa R leaders by the State were thus palpable at the time. The intervention lasted for six years; in 1987 Causa R recovered the majority of the seats in the SUTISS executive committee. Velásquez describes how the president of Fetrametal in 1986 tried to bribe him to come to terms over the conflict and to overcome the obstacle that the workers’ support of the Causa movement entailed. Velásquez argues that the State intervention in SUTISS was both political and economic, and as for the economic aspects of the intervention, the interventionists received the money that would have been contributed to the Causa R leadership.

Causa R has maintained its power in SUTISS since 1987. Nevertheless, quite early in this process Maneiro and Medina decided to go to Caracas to expand the political movement. With a grassroots approach, they succeeded in forming a popular base for the movement in the densely populated Catia barrio, the Pro-Catia organization. Furthermore, as in the birth of the traditional parties, they also managed to gain increasing support among the students of the Universidad Central de Venezuela. As mentioned in the background chapter on the birth of the modern Venezuelan parties, students and the university have been important sources for political movements. The generation of 28 evolved into the parties that would dominate the main part of political organized activities and development until the 1990’s. Generally, the political activities of the student movements have been in opposition to the government. But these students have also played roles as emerging political leaders and reformers (ever since the generation of 28).

As political scientist Richard Hillman puts it:

Overall, students continue to perceive themselves, and are perceived by the rest of society, as the inheritors of a tradition of political involvement in national politics. Their

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intellectual development, access to information, and social status produce a strategic political capacity for which many students enthusiastically assume responsibility.\textsuperscript{326}

In Caracas, a mass movement – \textit{Venezuela 83} – was led and developed by Causa R leaders Maneiro and Medina in alliance with intellectuals and prominent student leaders. The organization of the movement in Catia was first called \textit{Catia 83} but soon changed name to Pro-Catia. In Caracas too the movement and mobilizations were based on the publication and distribution of newspapers and magazines. Among the students, the newspaper \textit{Prag} functioned as the vehicle for spreading information, and in 1982 the Causa R leaders were offered access to the prestigious social and political analysis magazine \textit{Resumen}, by its editor in chief, the wealthy intellectual Jorge Olavarría. Olavarría had a conservative background but was heavily engaged in denouncing all kinds of corruption, including in the steel industry and union movement in Bolivar. When Maneiro suddenly died in 1982, Olavarría intended to fill the vacuum of leadership, but conflicts with Medina and other co-founders led to a split before the 1983 presidential elections, in which Causa R launched Andrés Velásquez and Olavarría ran on the ticket of a new political organization called \textit{Opina}.\textsuperscript{327}

Regarding the question of considering Causa R a movement rather than a political party, various leaders of Causa R and \textit{Nuevo Sindicalismo} repeat that the unionism of \textit{Nuevo Sindicalismo} is precisely a movement, rather than a trade union federation or confederation. Further, they state that Causa R also is to be considered a movement.\textsuperscript{328} When studying the Causa R, it is obvious that the traditional party structure is lacking. Causa R has no party congress, central or executive committee, or other formal mechanisms for choosing its leaders. Pablo Medina, leader of the party until the split in 1997, explains that the leaders emerge naturally at meetings and then usually become candidates of the party.\textsuperscript{329}

Andrés Velásquez holds that Causa R is more a movement than a party (like MAS, Velásquez and other Causa R leaders prefer to be referred to as a

\textsuperscript{326} Hillman, 1994: 85-86.
\textsuperscript{327} López Maya, 1997: 124-129.
\textsuperscript{328} Benítez, interview, Puerto Ordaz, 29 June 1997; Hernández, interview, Caracas, 16 July 1997.
\textsuperscript{329} Hellinger, 1996: 124-125.
“Movement of movements”), even if, technically, it is a political party at the same time. The difference is that Causa R does not have the electoral machinery that is traditional for Venezuelan parties, with inscription of affiliated members, and so on. Rather, the party repudiates this form of building a party. To be able to participate in national elections, though, the Venezuelan law requires that all electoral movements register as political parties. In 1978, Causa R finally registered officially as a political party.

Some social movement theorists would argue that Causa R went here from protest to proposal, even if it is impossible in practice to draw such an exact line or boundary where a transition takes place. Many analysts maintain that with the years, Causa R became more of a point-of-issue movement rather than having a clear ideological program. Daniel Hellinger holds that initially the idea of Causa R was to “develop a party that would represent rather than direct popular aspirations,” in contrast to previous political projects in Venezuela. In the following chapters on the relationships between Venezuelan decentralization and the party system, some aspects of the fate of these ambitions of Causa R will be presented.

The Latin Americanization of Venezuela

In a nutshell, Venezuelan society in the democratic years changed, while political institutions and the basic rules of the game did not. State institutions and parties could not “see” new social forces, much less attract or organize them. Beginning in the early 1980s, and with growing force thereafter, citizen groups and social movements of all kinds began to spring up apart from (…) parties and party-sponsored networks.

From the perspective of the continent, Venezuelan society experienced a transformation from exceptionalism to Latin Americanization during the 1980’s. That is, from having been considered the continent’s political and economic exception, suddenly the Venezuelan population could be seen to suffer from the same problems as other Latin American people, such as

331 Hellinger, 1996: 119.
poverty, unequal distribution of incomes, and State bureaucracy and inefficiency. In a longer-term perspective, both AD and COPEI had failed to benefit the urban poor. The AD government of Lusinchi drastically cut their subsidies when economic deterioration deepened. The austerity program of Pérez in 1989 further provoked the frustrations of the marginalized sectors, as well as their hopes of socio-economic ameliorations.336 As elsewhere in the continent, debates intensified on the need for profound State and democratization reforms.

Between 1958 and the 1970’s, Venezuela and Colombia were the only South American countries that had popularly and democratically elected presidents. During the 1980’s the great majority of the previously dictatorial regimes of the continent experienced a democratization process. Even if the 1980’s in Latin America are remembered economically as the “Lost Decade” (La década perdida), an overview of the political and institutional evolution displays another trend. As Fredrik Uggla sums it up, democratization in the Andean countries spread to Argentina, Uruguay, Brazil, and eventually to Paraguay and Chile.337 This transformation most likely created more pressure on Venezuela, as it did on Colombia and Mexico. In the Venezuelan case, the relatively stable democratic system was seen in a new light after democratization processes developed elsewhere in the continent, thus undermining the “exceptionalist status” of Venezuela. During the bonanza years, it had been easier for the centralized leadership of the political parties in State administration with access to the oil incomes to satisfy social-sector interests. The political and institutional-societal system of Venezuela before decentralization can be described as in the table below, although the table presented by Gil Yepes is displaying a basic institutional system structure.

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**Political System of Venezuela before Decentralization**

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<tr>
<th>SUBSYSTEM</th>
<th>MAJOR CHARACTERISTICS</th>
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<td>POLITICAL</td>
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<td>- Economic Interventionism</td>
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<td>- Institutional Colonization by Political Parties</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECONOMIC</td>
<td>State Capitalism and Import Substitution Interventionism</td>
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<td>SOCIAL</td>
<td>Paternalism towards masses and clientelism towards elites</td>
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It might not seem so strange that the drastic political reform that decentralization represented came in 1989. Venezuela had experienced a retrogressive decade in both macro-economic and individual socio-economic terms. The State institutions were no longer capable of providing basic services for the citizens. Drastic shortages of basic goods such as medicines and food emerged, deepening the popular dissatisfaction with the institutions and the political leaders. The AD-COPEI partyarchy suffered its worst crisis hitherto, with loss of support at the base level, as well as a lack of prestige.

If we now recall the ideas of Rokkan and Lipset on the “freezing of the party systems” based on the experiences of West European democracies, where parties that emerged during the 1920’s still dominated during the 1960’s. A similar pattern appears in the Venezuelan case, although it is quite clear that the dictatorial interruption of Pérez Jiménez delayed the freezing period of the parties. Compared with Latin America as a whole, the volatility of Venezuela’s party system was relatively low until 1992, indicating a high level of loyalty to the dominating parties (a characteristic shared with Colombia, Mexico and Uruguay). If partyarchy once guaranteed the Venezuelan political system relative stability, it also provoked its own undermining. This duopolization of politics, to use

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339 Mair, 2001: 27.

Coppedge’s words, hindered the institutionalization of political accountability between the electorate and the leadership. A true opposition was lacking, and likewise the two dominant parties efficiently obstructed access to the political society for alternative actors, for which reasons the system lost legitimacy and the traditional political leaders credibility.

In order to understand the social pressure for political change and the sudden strategy changes within AD, it is necessary to emphasize the national socio-economic situation of the late 1980’s. Shortly after the inauguration of the second government of CAP in February 1989, the President introduced a neo-liberal reform package (officially the program became known as el paquete) supported by technocrats from the IMF (and isolated from the majority of the AD national leadership). A minister in the CAP government defends the choice to go outside AD:

Carlos Andrés Pérez was preoccupied by not having well trained people in his own party. This made him reach out to members of the professional arena to become part of his government. That was his motivation. Our motivation was becoming part of a government that was liberal and was going to push for important changes not only in the economic area but also in the political [indicating decentralization, among others].

The crisis of AD and COPEI initially facilitated the economic measures, and the contents of the package were quite similar to the COPEI program. The package included privatization of public enterprises, devaluation of the currency, deregulation and tariff reduction in order to confront the acute economic crisis. Furthermore, the prices of goods produced by State industries were increased, including petroleum and consequently gasoline, which led in turn to increased tariffs for using public transport. This new political approach by the national government of CAP was not, however, a phenomenon that took place in isolation. In fact, the electorate had voted for CAP as an anti–free market political option, so the

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341 In Ramírez Roa, 2002: 173.
342 Pérez formed a cabinet consisting mainly of radical pro-market and technocratic academics from the Superior Institute of Administration Studies (IESA), among them Ricardo Hausmann, Moisés Naím and Miguel Rodríguez (Coppedge, 1998: 12). Hausmann and Naím were later recruited to multilateral banks.
343 Former Minister of Planning, Miguel Rodriguez, interviewed in Buxton, 2001: 45.
package disillusioned the public’s expectations of the new government. In the Latin American context, a wave of technocratization and neoliberalization arose during these years, for example, in Bolivia, Brazil and Peru.\textsuperscript{345} The almost immediate popular response to the CAP package was popular protests in all major Venezuelan cities, which culminated in looting, burning of vehicles and riots that lasted a week, remembered by Venezuelans as the \textit{Caracazo}.\textsuperscript{346}

\textsuperscript{345} For the Peruvian experience of the technocratization and the abandonment of the “old way” of doing politics, see, for example, \textit{Enter Economy, Exit Politics}, Teivainen, 2000. See also, Corrales, 2002, for an analysis of the technocratization in Venezuela and Argentina.

\textsuperscript{346} The measure that caused most frustration and anger among the population was without doubt the increase in the prices for using public transport, and this situation worsened when the bus drivers on their own initiative increased the tariffs even more to compensate for their own augmented costs.
DECENTRALIZATION AND PARTY SYSTEM CHANGE IN VENEZUELA

In a country where the centralization of power had been an historical constant, the election of governors in December 1989 opened a collective expectancy that the in-built resource distribution would make power more equitable.347

The Venezuelan Republic is constituted by 23 Federal states, a Federal District and a number of federal dependencies in the Caribbean Sea. In order to come to terms with the legitimacy crisis of the political system and also to strengthen the State, plans for a profound State reform were established in Venezuela. The centralization of political power and influence within the political party [AD and COPEI] made it difficult for ordinary citizens to have their voices heard within the party in order to put their topics and priorities on the agenda. A first step towards decentralization in Venezuela had been initiated already in 1978, with the Municipal Management Law (Ley Orgánica de Régimen Municipal) – LORM-, which granted legal status and power to neighborhood associations, inclusive the legal recognition as exclusive representatives of their own community.348 Likewise the law established nonconcurrent and separate elections of municipal councils, contributing to political party diversity at the local level. Initially, the LORM was planned for introduction immediately after the establishment of the 1961 Constitution, but strong parties, presidentialism and fiscal centralism delayed the process of deepening municipal democratization.349 Until 1978 the municipal councilors elected a council leader that functioned as executive head of the local government. The reform of 1978 introduced a post of municipal administrator for municipalities of more than 50,000 inhabitants, inspired by the city manager model of the United States. The administrator was appointed for a five-year term and could be dismissed by a majority vote by the municipal councilors.350 Ellner concludes that the municipal management reform became crucial for the later development during the

1980’s, with the forthcoming decentralization reform and the direct elections of mayors and governors.

The neighborhood organizations became more important political spaces of formation, thus competing with the more traditional movements of labor that had lost its earlier status as prime democratic and political representative of the citizens. Furthermore, the political parties, and particularly AD, recognized the importance of the new political movement and intervened in the activities and organization of the neighborhood movements in a similar way that the party previously controlled the labor and peasant movements. In fact AD also restructured and changed its internal party statutes to provide the AD activists in the neighborhood associations an automatic inclusion in the AD municipal convention.  

Already in 1971 a network created by citizens of the middle-class was formed and would evolve into the Federation of Urban Community Association –FACUR- (Federación de Asociaciones de Comunidades Urbanas). Although, initial non-partisan ideals of FACUR were in 1978 abandoned, when AD succeeded in co-opting the neighborhood association through governmental economic support. Interestingly, the President that introduced the Municipal Management Law was Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP) and this is of great importance for the understanding of the consequences of party factionalism within AD. Furthermore, in 1975 the Pérez government created the Organic Law for the Coordination of the Situado. (The “situado” implies the percentage of the national budget that is transferred to the states.) The law signified a provision of national executive input in the planning of public projects within the regional state governments, economically based on the “situado”.

At the time of the return to government power of CAP, the rivalry between him and the centralist hard-liners within the party was already palpable, and furthermore, CAP also suspected that a too strong party discipline could be dangerous and thus mainly consulted with reliable friends. Returning to the neighborhood associations, the following presidential mandate by COPEI and Herrera Campíns showed similar patterns to those of AD and FACUR.

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351 Ellner, 1999 a: 78-87.
353 Ellner, 1999 b.
The government hoped to be able to compete with AD at the neighborhood level and used State funds to favor its own favorized associations.\footnote{Hellinger, 1991: 171.}

As mentioned in the introduction, the decentralization reforms in Latin America coincided with the economic crisis, which also brought social and political repercussions, like disenchantment towards the traditional political parties and their apparent incapacity to confront the crisis and to prioritize the needs of the people. Venezuelan constitutionalist Allan Brewer-Carías, Minister of Decentralization between 1993 and 94, concludes that one decisive factor to understand the crisis was the excessively strong position and control by the traditional political parties over the State. Further, he argues that the democratic, centralized party State that developed since democratization in 1958 had shown to be irreversible within the State institutions, which made a drastic democratization reform necessary, including a decentralization of the party system as well.\footnote{Brewer-Carías, 1994: 12-13.}

Another important factor of why the crisis became so difficult from the early 1980’s was that the Venezuelan civil society had become more complex than earlier when practically the only interest groups to satisfy were business and labor. New organizations and groups appeared and had problems in having their voices heard due to the closure of the political system. Luis Salamanca explores several dimensions of this changing panorama. First, the urban dimension, with the emergence of non-party associated neighborhood associations, such as FACUR and the Casa de Vecinos (Neighbors House).\footnote{See also forthcoming section on Proyecto Carabobo for description of the Casa de Vecinos.} A communitarian dimension covers groups of consumers, local cultural and religious movements and micro-companies. A “new” trade union movement is challenging the CTV (as presented in the section on Causa R and Nuevo Sindicalismo), with ties to the first two categories (urban neighbor and communitarian organizations, e.g. Pro-Catia in Caracas). A business dimension of civil society is a further category, for example the Grupo Roraima, formed by a group of intellectuals that promoted free market and anti-Statist policies. Fourth, a cluster of gender-oriented NGO’s have emerged, as well as environmental groups, in all competing with the traditional civil society represented by labor and business.\footnote{Salamanca, 1995: 206-209.} Amidst this pressing situation, the Venezuelan State itself could
be considered the initiator of the decentralization, even if the growing pressure from below as the economic crisis deepened at the same time contributed to the eventual State reforms. The traditional super-centralization of the State had seriously damaged the efficiency of the regional institutions, since it must have been difficult for the central government to exactly know how and when new economic resources were needed in the distinct states (i.e., the efficiency argument of decentralization).

What had been the strength of the Venezuelan political and democratic systems through the partyarchic model in the long run also provided destabilizing effects.

The Party System put at Stake? The COPRE State Reform

In the Commission there was debated whereas the Venezuelan society was mature enough to function with a higher efficiency in its relations within a decentralized political scheme, and if this orientation not brought negative incitements for the national structures and the conduction unity of the public power.

In the presidential elections of 1983, Jaime Lusinchi of AD triumphed with the promises of a “Pact for Social Democracy”, in which he promised a political opening and a dialogue between the parties and the Venezuelan civil society, that is, recognizing that Partyarchy and the traditional pact-strategies were problems. In office, Lusinchi created the Presidential Commission for Reform of the State –COPRE- (Comisión Presidencial para la Reforma del Estado) using the tradition of a presidential decree. The objective was to promote “A modern state, efficient and democratic, that can materialize the Constitution principles and make public participation an effective element of public decisions.” According to COPRE’s executive secretary of the time, Carlos Blanco, the commission was the result of two contributing factors. First; the public opinion climate on the general elections and the need to carry through deeper State and society reforms, and, secondly, the ambitions of the president to create a project that would involve greater parts of the Venezuelan political and civil society. In 1987 the document “More and better democracy” (Más y

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357 See for example, de la Cruz, 1995: 17; Combellas, 1997.
358 COPRE, 1987: 3.
360 In Spink, 1998: 142.
mejor democracia) was published, with recommendations concerning the division of competences of the distinct government levels and the promotion of measures to amplify the legitimacy of the political system.361 Another member of the COPRE board, UCV researcher Manuel Rachadell (with connections to COPEI) recalls one important conclusion of the first COPRE formation:

…The important thing was not to reform the State from within, to change the Ministries, divide some in two, fusion one with another or to change the function and authority of an institution, but rather a development of civil society, the capacity of the community to control its governors [political leaders], to get them in charge the efficiency of the functioning of public services under a political system that permitted this participation, that permitted the punishment and premium voting respectively towards the governors.(…) what is becoming more and more evident since 1958 and in the context of the democratic regime, is that if something has been centralist in Venezuela, it has to be the democratic system. They speak about the centralism of Gómez, but during the epoch of Gómez a state president governed. Later, the governors become third range functionaries that not would be received by the Minister of Interior Affairs when they went to Caracas, neither the director of the Ministry; the chief of politics or the corresponding department receives them. In this process of centralism under the democratic regime, the governor lost all kinds of representability of his community before the central power.362

The final proposal by COPRE, as Carlos Blanco expresses was to aim for: a decentralized State and political parties that strived for representing upwards rather than controlling downwards. Further; better policy mechanisms and economic management, a more functional judiciary apparatus, support of civil society organizations and local government and in all a more efficient State and a more democratic society. Regarding these pursuits in the fields of efficiency and democratization of the State, Blanco expressed that:

…As has been said, this approach does require technical, administrative and legal transformations, but it is not a reformulation restricted to organization charts, nor new codes and norms, nor creating a new technocracy to remove political vices within administration; the reform requires such actions but does not end with these. It is

362 Rachadell, 1997: 228-229. The contribution of Rachadell is taken from a publication produced as the result of an evaluation conference on the Venezuelan decentralization.
fundamentally a process of power redistribution, in which democracy is broadened and in which the State recuperates its leadership role and abandons its invasive characteristics...  

The reform series of COPRE was the first serious and broad reform movement in Venezuela that directly focused democratic participation mechanisms, including with the transfer of decision-making power from central national government to the municipal and state levels of government. The purpose was to make political participation more meaningful on the lower government levels, and also to decrease the functions of political parties in electoral processes. The main slogan of COPRE became, “Democratize democracy”.  

Despite the previously mentioned positive official ambitions, the project of COPRE halted and was repeatedly delayed. Political scientist Brian Crisp sees COPRE almost as a mirror of the traditional polity system and therefore its difficulties in achieving the implementation of the proposals. Institutionally, COPRE was a consultative body within the executive power, and, as mentioned, created by presidential decree. The members of COPRE were appointed by, and responded only to the president. For these reasons many COPRE members felt being politically co-opted. “Criticizing from the outside was not efficacious, but criticizing from the inside had its limitations too.”

David Myers concludes that the closed corporatist [and centralist] traits of the Venezuelan government were never before so apparent as with the Lusinchi government.  

Summing up the Lusinchi mandate, he promoted decentralization in discourse, but delayed and resisted it in practice. Similarly, though, compared with pre-dominating State commissions, the COPRE board was to be considered as much more pluralist. In one of the first analytical studies of the commission, the following party representation distribution indicates that neither AD nor COPEI alone dominated the COPRE:

**Political orientation of COPRE members:**

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Decentralization: A Panacea for all Political Ills?

In 1985, all actors selected [for COPRE] agreed in recognizing the deviation or distortion of the role that political parties ideally ought to play as mediators between society and the State. The distortion was manifested, according to the opinions expressed before COPRE, on three levels: the lack or absence of democracy within organizations; inequality in interparty relations; and blockage of the dynamism of civil society by the penetration, in civil organizations, of the guidelines dictated from the highest levels of the parties. This self-criticism made by the parties and also shared by FEDECAMARAS corresponded to the intense debate that, as we have seen, had been building in Venezuela since the beginning of the decade.\(^{368}\)

Political scientist Ricardo Combellas, ex-President of COPRE, describes that since its formation the ambitions of COPRE were basically rooted in two strategic objectives. First, to obtain more efficient and effective State institutions on the local and regional levels, and second to transfer State power closer to the citizens, which should be realized through an opening of the political system. Additionally, expectations were held to clean up the political system of traditional vices from “the centralized federation”, such

\(^{368}\) Coppedge, 1992: 160.
as bureaucratic, clientelistic practices and corruption. In a preparatory discussion brochure of COPRE in 1987 it is stated that:

…The decentralization that we propose signifies a strengthening of the states, instead of a de-concentration scheme towards the regions that has been valid, at least theoretically, under the policy of regionalization. The transfer of competencies that is suggested is a complicated process, with judicial, economic-financial and administrative implications. But, most of all it has social and political consequences because it confronts a tendency towards a concentration of power in the central sphere that in all lights seem to be let loose by the number and the magnitude of the tasks that are assigned there.

The centralization and concentration of decision power within AD, COPEI, [and also MAS], was widely criticized from the early 1980’s onwards, also from self-conscientious politicians within the parties. This criticism contributed to the decision to create the COPRE, but it is important to emphasize that most of the COPRE delegates were sympathizers of the political parties. In the mid and late 1980’s both AD and COPEI suffered since a long time from an increasing pressure from their regional party bases, which struggled for access to power through a more and more questioned party loyalty. Nelly Arenas and Carlos Mascareño argue that this pressure made the decentralization reforms possible, including with the direct elections of mayors and governors. The constant pressure from the regions gave birth to new ideas, projects and aspirations among the regional party militants, with a new functioning model of the states that differed from the ruling centralist paradigm.

The most arduous mission within the COPRE scheme emerged in the resistance against the efforts to ameliorate internal party democracy, and to make parties more open as for financial accountability and nomination procedures. As Crisp puts it: “…the parties had become pragmatic and corrupt machines beyond the reach of democratic and ethic controls.” COPRE, including forces of the representation of the traditional parties, early realized this obstacle for the carrying through of the reforms. Analyzing the party system from within, and the possible failure of

traditional parties to continue a dominant position within the political and societal systems, there are various factors important to consider, as seen in the figure below:

**Political Party System: Credibility Crisis and Political Repercussions**

The figure departs from the electorate, that is, the popular attitudes towards the parties. Whereas an existing crisis of a political party embeds a negative mutual relationship of insecurity and skepticism vis-à-vis the electorate, this is normally preceded by (perceptions of) political failures. Following the logic of collective action within political opportunity structures, the pressure from below, and within (grassroots organizations, factions, opposition movements etc.) creates an increased probability of authorities to agree to reform, and thus with openings for challenging actors. As seen, the increased discontentment might also lead to electoral passivity and decreased party loyalties. 373 Enrique Andara resumes the failures of the traditional parties in both structural and cultural terms:

The problem of the Venezuelan political parties is that they have not been able to create, as the scholars always mention, a pedagogic structure within the party. First of all, to generate responsible citizens, they did not generate that. Secondly, to generate efficient

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373 This discussion will continue in the next chapter, around the graphic of Venezuela’s political system until 1993.
administrative and technical public cadres, that is, efficient public functionairies, ministers, parliamentary deputies, etc. They failed in generating that. 374

The ambitions of COPRE to democratize the internal party structure were long resisted in AD and COPEI with the arguments of being in emergency situations. As for the legitimating of minority factions within the party MAS had pioneered already in the 1970’s as protesting against monolithic traditions and centralist party machines of the traditional parties. At the same time, the historic experiences of both AD (in 1968) and MAS (in 1978) had shown that grassroots selection of presidential candidates often degenerated into acute factional conflict situations. Although, all three parties (AD, COPEI and MAS) have modified their statutes as a consequence of the COPRE reforms (and particularly decentralization) as for the decision-making power at municipal and regional state level within the parties. 375

George Philip concludes that the Venezuelan political system [partyarchy] suffered from a lack of State impartiality and autonomy, that is, a too close party-State relationship. This over-penetration by the party machines of the State implied that the party elites stood above the law, alienated to parties (AD and COPEI), and particularly the party that at the time held the presidency. Therefore, COPRE saw political and administrative decentralization as urgent to solve the problem of political representation, since it otherwise could create uncomfortable tensions. 376

In 1989 the Organic Law of Decentralization, Delimitation and Transfer of Competences -LODDT- (Ley Orgánica para la Descentralización, Delimitación y Transferencia de Competencias) was finally approved and immediately opened a polemic debate between the defenders of centralism versus decentralizers. Ironically, the President that introduced COPRE, Jaime Lusinchi, was one of the leading adecos that most grimly tried to resist the actual implications of decentralization, which was particularly obvious before the first direct elections for governor in 1988. 377 The Lusinchi faction (the “Lusinchistas” or “Conservadores”) within AD used

377 Ellner, 1993b.
its majority in Congress to postpone the direct elections of governors and mayors. It was first when Carlos Andrés Pérez (CAP), that is, the leader of the other AD faction, called the “perecistas” or “reformistas”) had taken over the presidency in 1989, that political and administrative decentralization reforms were approved. In the bitter polarization between the two AD factions, CAP also took advantage of his relations with the younger grassroots leaders, like Claudio Fermin and Antonio Ledezma, and used the decentralization to offer both them and the opposition parties political space and representation as a sort of political compromise.\textsuperscript{378} As for CAP’s ties with the AD grassroots leaders, political scientist Enrique Andara clarifies that Fermin, Ledezma and other young adecos had supported Pérez already in the 1970’s, and particularly before the Municipal Management Law (LORM) of 1978.\textsuperscript{379} A broad faction within AD had resisted also the LORM before its implementation, since many adecos saw that the reform threatened their political career.\textsuperscript{380}

**Economic Crisis and Political Opportunities**

We stand before a central government that accumulate in its hands a de-moderated quote of power, due to its condition of principal actor of the modernization process of the country (…) we have to support a heavy bureaucratic centralized machinery that every day encounters bigger difficulties to process the problems of distinct order (…) decentralization is one of the axis of the reform, designed to give answers to the social reclaim of major access to the decisions and the increase in efficiency of public services and administration. This implies a transfer of competencies and functions from the central government towards the state and municipal governments.\textsuperscript{381}

As argued in the theoretical section on political opportunity structures, the economic strength or decline of a State matters, as for opportunities of collective action for political opposition organizations. A causal relationship between economic factors and political reforms (e.g. decentralization) can thus be discerned. In the context of the deepening economic crisis since the 1980’s and “new” opportunities for civil and political society organizations to mobilize, Crisp and Levine hold that indeed [economic] decline matters.

\textsuperscript{378} Penfold-Becerra, 1997: 18-23.
\textsuperscript{379} Andara, interview, Caracas, 12 February, 2004.
\textsuperscript{380} Salamanca, 1998: 393-394.
This is not necessarily manifested only in such way of weakening elite capacity of control [of previously dominated, penetrated, or marginalized societal activities and organizations], but also in more active movements in protest against the ruling regime. These movements (groups, forces) consist of active men and women with ambitions of changing the political agenda and order of the political system and can be developed from within, at the margins or outside the established institutional framework. Likewise, a great part of the politically active citizens had no personal experience of military regime, thus forming an expression of a new generation of Venezuela’s democratic development, and with a population far more urbanized, educated and informed as for mass communication than ever before. During the 1980’s civil society movements began to pressure forcefully for effective decentralization, electoral reforms and municipal political independence.

New political and social cleavages emerged with the economic crisis. A myth of Venezuela as a classless and consensus based country had surrounded AD and COPEI, but new actors appeared as challenging alternatives, e.g. Causa R as a working class representative, as well as other more neo-liberal organizations. The social and political pressure increased heavily after the Caracazo riots, while CAP’s popularity consequently decreased steadily. Both opposition parties and establishment politicians used the popular disillusion to attract sympathizers of their own parties, especially Causa R and its leader Andrés Velásquez grew stronger in popular support during the remaining government period of CAP. In a special edition by Venezuelan newspaper El Nacional, dedicated to the Caracazo riots, the dramaturge and societal analyst Ibsen Martínez most skeptically relates the riots with the general political frustration and the COPRE reforms:

... The politician has developed in a sleepwalker style during these 30 years (...) the mid-level force, the regional leader; call it whatever – bases his loyalty pertinenence in something close to Platonism: he is tight with Eduardo [Fernández of COPEI] or with Carlos Andrés [Pérez] or Jaime [Lusinchi]. (...) The Reform arrives too late, fatally: nobody, except the COPRE doctors, and the applicants of mayoralties, believes in it. It is not only question of the discredit that marks the entire political class. It is also due to its

impertinence. Why [should we have] a mayor? (...) Seriously, to multiplicate the instances of corruption? 385

The general disagreement with the political system as such had indeed gone far. Without denying the positive results of decentralization in terms of the political pluralization and the appearance of "new" previously excluded actors, Julia Buxton concludes that in an overall perspective of the first six years following 1989, the COPRE reforms failed to reach the expressed intentions. The increasing electoral abstention is here one indicator of how participation decreased instead of increased as was expected with the reforms. 386 The two military coup attempts of in 1992 and the popular sympathy that the rebels (or coup leaders) enjoyed were other evident manifestations of the general social and political discontent. President Pérez refused to abandon his reform program throughout 1992, despite the continuous and growing social and political pressure in form of strikes, demonstrations, military coup attempts and criticism both from citizens and politicians from all parties (including AD). 387

CAP did not finish his presidential mandatory. In 1993 he was impeached for mismanagement of State funds and other corruption-linked scandals. Leaders of the Causa R party and journalist and Leftist politician José Vicente Rangel played major roles in the denouncing of Pérez and the Causa R presented the act of denouncement that led to the judicial process against Pérez. 388 In an influential collection of 1995, Lessons of the Venezuelan Experience, the editors concluded that first in 1992 non-party affiliated voter groups started to investigate the partisan manipulation of the electoral council. During the same period, citizen associations initiated a more evident search political representation outside the traditional political parties. 389 From certain perspectives one might conclude that the electorate

387 See for example, Benton, 1997: 1.
388 My observations in 1992, and interviews with e.g., Benítez, Puerto Ordaz, 29 June 1997; Zapata, Caracas, 18 May, 2 & 30 July, 1997. Rangel is while writing this vice-President of Venezuela. He has been Minister of Defense, and previously Minister of Interior Affairs and Justice, of the government of Hugo Chávez. He was a member of the URD party in the 1940’s, co-founder of the MEP party in 1967 and has been presidential candidate on various occasions.
389 Goodman et. al., 1995: 399.
showed signs of increasing political consciousness and responsibility, whereas the traditional parties weakened and suffered from the deepening credibility crisis and internal disputes. Rosa Amelia González concludes that whereas the national political system suffered from increasing stability, the evolution in several regional states suggests a diametrically opposing process with the consolidation of the regional leaderships.390

Electoral system in Venezuela before and after Decentralization

The electoral system is the system of AD. AD protects this system making it susceptible to fraud, outright corruption and the stealing of votes. AD has been the main force behind the lack of modernisation in our electoral system, because they thrive within it.391

Before the decentralization reforms were implemented the strong political parties had a firm and centralized control of the selections of political leaders on all political-territorial levels. In the case of the governorships, the governor depended earlier only on the President or the executive organ of the party that both nominated and dismissed the governors until 1989. Deputies for the regional [federal] states’ legislative assemblies were elected by direct, secret and universal suffrage through a system with closed lists, where the voter selected only the political party preference. The political parties then made the decisions on which candidate should be suitable for the respective posts, including the Senate, the Chamber of Deputies and the Municipal Councils.392 Beside the directly nominated state governors, municipal prefects were also appointed from the central level and exercised far-reaching political power at the local level.393

Electoral System 1958-1988

393 Crisp & Levine, 1998: 45.
With this centralized system and a winner-takes-all model for distribution and nomination of governors, a regional political map of Venezuela would be completely white with a presidential triumph of AD, as seen below:

**Political Map of Venezuela with an AD President until 1988**

Notwithstanding, there were public elections of municipal political representatives long before the LORM and COPRE reforms. Since 1936 (with exception of the dictatorial period under Pérez Jiménez), Venezuelans also voted for the candidates of the municipal councils. In their turn, the municipal councils served also to select the deputies of the National Congress. It is important to mention, though, that the municipal councils were weak bureaucratic institutions, also after the implications of the LORM modifications in 1978. The municipal system with an administrator and a municipal leader was abolished through the COPRE reforms. Institutionally, the newly created mayoralities from 1989 onwards, inherited the weaknesses of the municipal councils and enjoyed limited freedom for institutional reforms, clearly restrained from the centralist party hierarchies.
Also the governances suffered from this political and institutional centralist heritage.\(^{394}\)

Decentralization covers many dimensions and also includes some risks when power is moved from central state control, to the lower regional and local levels. For instance, there are possibilities that the governor and the mayors could give after for the easiness to create a popular support through a clientelistic system, where social and economic benefits are interchanged for political support in the local and regional elections. A "new" kind of clientelism, or possibilities for clientelistic behavior can appear with the decentralized government. Since 1989 the governor has to create his own regional support and is supposed to aim for an increased autonomy towards the State and the party. Therefore, the governors and the mayors too are more vulnerable in such way that they now are directly dependent on regional/local popular support.

Guerón and Manchisi agree upon that this possible situation of the concentrated power around the mayors and the governors constitutes a threat to the decentralization process.\(^{395}\) Naturally, this situation creates new perspectives for the importance of the governor’s (and the mayor’s) role and efficiency, since the public opinion directly determine the continuation of the same. The State is now closer to the citizens and the mayors and the governors are the principal direct channels for social participation on the local and regional levels. A relationship between civil society, the parties, and through these, the State, based on populism and clientelistic mechanisms is not so easy to abolish totally and in one blow. During the rentier years, this party-mediated patron-client model could be assumed to have stimulated political passivity, which partly can be explained with the "downwards filtration principle", i.e., if only the citizens contribute with the votes, some of the economic resources of the State would reach the people.

With the decentralization process the decision-making procedure changed significantly, with direct elections of regional governors, municipal mayors, deputies for the regional state legislative assemblies and representatives of the neighborhood governing councils (juntas parroquiales), all of these authorities elected every third year. Regarding the juntas, these replaced the

\(^{394}\) Mascareño, 2000: 92.

\(^{395}\) Guerón & Manchisi, 1996: 397.
authority of neighborhood associations, party base committees and peasant unions. During decentralization’s first years of operation the mayor appointed the *junta*, but since 1992 the junta representatives are elected directly, as seen in the models below:

**Electoral System 1989-1992**

![Electoral System 1989-1992 diagram]

**Electoral System since 1992**

![Electoral System since 1992 diagram]

An increased degree of citizen influence on the political leadership is one direct consequence of these political, institutional and electoral reforms, but also confusions on the new political-territorial divisions. The example of Caracas is illustrative:
For those of us that live and move around dailywise in the city, Caracas is a geographic unity. If we go to Catia we are in Caracas, if we go to Petare we are in Caracas, and if we move to El Hatillo we are in Caracas. But, what customs and a minimal common sense state, the invisible maps of the political-territorial maps refute us. If we walk in Catia we are in the Municipality Libertador of the Federal District, but if we go to Petare or El Hatillo we are in the state of Miranda.  

**Strategies within the Political Parties towards Decentralization**

…The way to do politics is changing and will continue to change, to benefit civil society and to weaken party structures. The successful career of a politician will not any longer be measured by the posts he is in charge of, or have been in charge of within the political party, but from how many elections he has won as legislator, mayor or governor.

Leaders from all political parties defended decentralization (at one time or another), idealizing the municipal and neighborhood political levels, and arguing that only there, ordinary citizens had the possibility to participate. These positions contributed to the strengthening of the local government at the municipal level, and several grassroots leaders succeeded in having new municipalities recognized from 1989 onwards. In 1978 there existed 188 municipalities in Venezuela. In 1990 this number had increased to 269 and before the elections of 1995, 330 municipalities were officially recognized. Maria Matheus and Maria Elena Romero suggest that this tendency is the consequence of the pressure caused by the political parties to create new spaces for the distribution of power in a moment of legitimacy crisis. They argue further that the parties calculate with new possible power territories through municipal divisions and the creation of new municipalities.

The creation of new municipalities is regulated in the LORM and has to be approved in the respective Legislative Assembly of the state of the concerned municipality and/or new municipality. Guerón and Manchisi have studied the municipal fragmentation and its consequences as for

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400 LORM, 1989, Articles 17-18.
differences in development and governability, including with an apparent economic segregation between “rich” and “poor” municipalities. They conclude that small municipalities with relatively few necessities can benefit from the system of municipal financing (dominated by the *Situado Municipal*). The fiscal capability in the municipality has also showed to be decisive for the outcome, as well as the income and tax base of the municipality. Most likely, a mayor (or governor) with favorable initial conditions enjoys higher probability of succeeding in the development of municipal projects and governability.⁴⁰¹

Returning to the game-theoretic approach to decentralization and elections, the traditionally so centralized COPEI considered that political decentralization would improve their electoral turnouts. MAS too also saw new political and electoral opportunities opening within these reforms.⁴⁰² To illustrate the political weight of the decentralization reform in the 1988 elections, and the conscience about it among leading politicians, in the 1988 presidential campaign, the COPEI candidate Eduardo Fernández spoke about the urgent need of decentralization and proposed direct elections of governors and mayors. The day after, Carlos Andrés Pérez of AD openly made this idea and electoral promise his owns.⁴⁰³ The traditional MAS leader Teodoro Petkoff traced the final agreement to decentralize on behalf of the traditional parties to both public pressure and “demagogic competition” among party leaders in the presidential electoral campaign of 1988 [that is, decentralization had become a fashionable topic in the political discourses]. Specifically, Petkoff argued that:

AD and COPEI were out of sync with the rhythm of social and economic transformations since the early 1980s …[transformations] such as the attempts to widen the frontiers of democracy with the direct elections of governors and mayors. These reforms were made against the desires of AD and COPEI. They emerged not only from the growing pressure of public opinion, but also from the demagogic competition among some of the leaders of those parties. The direct election of governors emerged from the competition between Pérez and Fernández in the 1988 electoral campaign. Fernández, thinking that AD would never accept it, proposed the direct election of governors; when

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Pérez saw that he was going to be overrun by Fernández, he embraced the proposal and imposed it on his resistant party.404

One might question how much of genuine political will and how much populist opportunism really stood behind the Pérez decentralization promises. As an internationally active politician, Pérez might have had interest in global currents of decentralization reforms, while at the same time it seemed as an adequate and technical move to handle the internal conflicts within AD. On the other hand, within COPEI, one of the party’s maximum historical leaders, ex-president Luis Herrera Campíns, was directly opposed to the opening of the political system and regarding the possibility of direct elections of governors, he expressed that:

The current regime of incorporation [of state governors] through the nomination procedure by the President of the Republic should be maintained. The possibility of incorporation through elections … could weaken the necessary force (…) that regarding the social totality, is fulfilled in our countries by the National Executive power, and by the President of the Republic.405

Similarly, AD’s maximum leader of the epoch, Gonzalo Barrios, pronounced that:

The Commission should reject any modification motion of our sui géneris federative formula. At the same time I am a supporter of the maintenance of the majority of the restrictions whose abolishment is demanded by some “advanced” spirits without serious contact with the realities of the country. Thus, the election of governors, transitorily maintained suspended through delegation, should be conserved in the same state, under penalty of supporting very negative phenomena in the political life of the unities where it would have been applied. 406

405 Mascareño, 2000: 24. Ironically, before the presidential elections of 1998, Herrera Campíns was the most powerful of the COPEI leaders in the faction that promoted the back-up of Irene Sáez as the party’s candidate, i.e., one of the options most associated with the continuation of the decentralization process.
The Elections of 1989

On the 3rd of December of 1989, Venezuelans went to the polls to elect state governors, municipality mayors and council members. The “doors” (or “gates”) to the State and political government arena were opened. A total of 97 candidates and 53 parties registered and ran for the posts of 20 state governorships. Although, five parties shared the 20 governances and of these AD and COPEI together captured 17. MAS, Causa R and the MEP party triumphed in one state each. It might be seen as a continuation of the bipartisan tradition and that AD and COPEI calculated well according to the game theories related to decentralization. On the other hand, the three states where the “newer” parties won, Aragua, Bolívar and Anzoátegui, are among the most important industrial states of the nation, which adds another dimension of the results, since AD here lost power and control of previous traditional strongholds (as the three states). With respect to the regional political force of MAS in Aragua, the seven of the nationally eleven municipal victories of MAS were in the state of Aragua. In these state elections, COPEI obtained six municipalities and AD only two. 407 Carlos Tablante who was elected governor of Aragua describes in a personal interview the cross-party and societal alliances that emerged in the first decentralized elections.

Some very small groups supported MAS in the direct elections of governor. A coalition named la Fuerza de Aragua (Aragua Force) was formed, but obviously the big parties went to the elections with their own candidates, which we beat. In the regional legislative assembly during our government we had some alliances of leadership that we handled with responsibility in which regional deputies of COPEI were included. But, basically this concerned society groups not associated with MAS through the party membership card, but in a way that we could call Federal-local. That is, everyone followed his own organization of union, without losing identity, and without having us demanding a Leninist style of militancy. The banner of Fuerza Aragua was: “Every one with his/her things, but together defending what belongs to all of us: Aragua”. 408

In one of the first analyses made on the results of the elections of 1989, Carrasquero & Welsch emphasize a common characteristic of the three electoral levels, namely the variety of alliances. Of the 20 elected governors, 17 represented more than one party, as well as 148 of the 269

408 Tablante, 2003 b (My italics).
elected mayors. At the municipality council level, though, this feature was weaker, only 377 of the totally 1963 posts counted with alliances.  

**Elections of Governors and Mayors 1989**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>AD</th>
<th>COPEI</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governors</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2 (LCR &amp; MEP)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayors</td>
<td>149</td>
<td>99</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Municipal Councillors</td>
<td>903</td>
<td>772</td>
<td>156</td>
<td>132</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the elections of 1989, Causa R took over, among others, the governance of Bolívar, where the movement always has been strongest since it has its roots there. Andrés Velásquez describes the atmosphere that surrounded him and Causa R when they decided to launch him for the Bolívar governorship. What made it easier for Velásquez to accept the candidacy was that he felt that the people supported him and wanted him to be their governor:

We responded to the compromise to run a second time for the presidency, and finally for this candidature of the Governorship. We were very clear and we knew what it would mean, the battle we had to go through, with an organization without resources, and as people say, without an electoral machinery, which is another trap that the political parties place out. We did not have resources, but we indeed had politics, which we moved forward towards this company of Governorship. In a zone where Acción Democrática [...] had the biggest electoral machinery of the country, the most secure, with deepest domination thanks to this corrupt penetration within the state that permitted the corruption of everything and that inclusively tried to corrupt the soul of the people. And there they were wrong [...] because with the clarity of our suggestions when we struggled for the governorships, to win it, with the compromise to not leave the people alone, but to give the people opportunities. And this was one of the arguments that we agreed upon, to not leave the battlefield without a fight.  

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411 Velásquez interviewed in, Sesto, 1992b: 133-134.
The deepened credibility crisis within the traditional political parties also played in the hands of Causa R, that with an aggressive anti-party and anti-establishment approach found popular support also in other societal sectors. Also other Leftist parties (as MAS and PCV) were attacked by Causa R and before the elections of 1989, the party turned down an offer from MAS to form an alliance to back up Velásquez for the governorship of Bolivar.412

Reconsidering the theoretical ideas by Tilly on political repression and facilitation within the field of collective action and political opportunities, the evolution of Causa R in the context of decentralization is most interesting. Even if the Causa R movement through constant pressure had reached an important representation, reputation and strength in the union movement of the steel industry, it was first with the decentralization reform that a broader political opening was presented for the radicals. The pressure and demands from Causa R (and the attention the movement had in the media and among certain intellectuals and other symbolical personalities, e.g., priests) contributed successively to a smoothening of the earlier repressive situation vis-à-vis the government. In this context political decentralization would signify facilitation in terms of possibilities of collective action with lower costs, and the opportunity to break through the barriers to the State.

Decentralization versus Partyarchy

Like Penelope besieged by her suitors, the Venezuelan elite promises to accede to the bold demands of opening and renewal that the newcomers make. By day, they weave the reforms that, they affirm, will be the burial shroud of clientelist and exclusionary democracy. But in the dark, they unravel the weaving, perhaps hoping for the caudillo who could rise to the task of expelling the intruders.413

In the context of Machiavellian reform constraints, Gómez Calcaño and López Maya launch the brilliant metaphor to Greek mythology seen in the quotation above. There were indeed a lot of political expectations when decentralization was introduced, also within AD and COPEI. Ever since COPRE initiated the planning of the urgent State, political, institutional, including decentralization reforms, politicians from the traditional AD

413 Gómez Calcaño & López Maya, 1990: 207; Coppedge, 1994 a: 166.
leadership have tried to resist the processes, most notably during the Jaime Lusinchi government of 1984-1988. “The traditional leadership of the governing party saw, correctly, that the reforms had the potential to change the rules of the political game, and thus the prevailing distribution of power.” Coppendge views decentralization as an ambition to get rid of the hierarchic features of partyarchy, but similarly he emphasizes that very few party leaders appreciated the reform, except for the presidential candidates. Myers too agrees on that centralist AD and COPEI leaders really never accepted the decentralization reform to be completely implemented. Their preferences were rather continued centralized control and they used this controlling advantage to dominate primary elections. From these first years of decentralization, rivals to the [beside Gonzalo Barrios] maximum leader of AD, Luis Alfaró Ucero –el caudillo-, were either expelled or left the party on their own initiative. Luis Herrera Campins played a similar centralist role in COPEI. To illustrate this centralistic ignorance, Claudio Fermín of AD was the first mayor to be elected to the prestigious Libertador Mayoralty, often referred to as the Caracas Mayoralty. This victory was achieved with scarce support from the central AD leadership.

Already during the first mandate of directly elected governors, conflicts between the central government of Carlos Andrés Pérez and the governors were frequently occurring. As Coppendge describes: “the division of powers between federal and state governments was still murky and procedures for resolving disputes had to be improvised for each issue that arose.” In Acción Democrática the official restructuring of the party met strong resistance (and even ignorance) from the central leadership of the party, and the distance between the political-territorial levels was often immense. In 1990, the governors of the party reclaimed that the AD maximum authority paid too little attention to the new process. “We have been left alone. Without any doctrinal or philosophic base”, said Ron Sandóval, governor of Táchira. “The CEN [National Executive Committee] is the prime responsible of the bad relationship that exists in the provinces between the government and the party”, expressed Elias D’onghia of the governorship of Portuguesa. Mariano Navarro, governor of Lara, proclaimed that: ”it

414 López Maya, 1997: 120.
417 Coppendge, 1994 b: 11.
cannot be possible that a governor elected by AD should go there alone, and without suitable relations with the party.”

At the same time, opposed by the centralist partisan leaderships, cross-party collaboration on the distinct political-territorial levels has increased with decentralization, beyond the traditional AD-COPEI pacts and alliances. Already in 1990, the document “Declaración de la Casa de la Estrella” was endorsed by all governors, from AD, COPEI, La Causa R and MAS. They agreed to meet every six months and to promote the acceleration of the decentralization process. The executive of the central government under Carlos Andrés Pérez was fast in supporting this project and to try to prevent collective action problems and also to put pressure on the national politicians to facilitate the most urgent administrative reforms related to decentralization. Nevertheless, both governors and the executive met forceful resistance from Congress.

Interestingly, Aragua and Bolívar are mentioned as the cases where the regional character of the candidates for the state governorship was as most significant (Carlos Tablante for MAS in Aragua, and Andrés Velásquez for Causa R in Bolívar). Ellner suggests that the regional victories of Tablante largely were due to his own reputation, more than the back up of the party. Like Velásquez in Bolívar, Tablante initiated a war against corruption and clientelism and showed a great regional interest. Tablante indeed disappointed some of his party colleagues by refusing them top positions within the governorship. These two, Velásquez and Tablante, have become known as the two "enfants terribles of decentralization" due to their young age and polemic and stormy governing periods. Both governors had to confront grave accusations of mismanagement etc. from AD representatives in the states. The AD and COPEI governors have not complained to the same extent as Tablante and Velásquez, at least not that outspoken (first in 1998 the AD governors would truly rebel against the central leadership).

Since the first meeting in 1990 the relationship between the President and the governors has been characterized by conflictivity, especially between

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418 Arenas & Mascareño, 1997: 43.
the governors of opposition parties and the center, like in the cases of Causa R in Bolívar, MAS in Aragua and MEP in the state of Anzoátegui. At this meeting, the Aragua governor declared the powers transformed to his unity as being insufficient. The governors of Bolívar and its neighbor Anzoátegui claimed not having received the funds for financing of the regional social development plan.421 Looking back at the period, though, Tablante classifies the decentralization reform as the best that ever has happened in Venezuela for many years, but he emphasizes that it should be accompanied by devolution also of sufficient economic resources,422 (criticism he is sharing with practically all mayors and governors).

Another Venezuelan scholar that has specialized in decentralization, Carlos Mascareño, holds that the first reaction of the political parties towards decentralization since the first election of governors and mayors was recognition of the regional leaderships. The cúpulas of the parties had no alternative but to assimilate the emerging provincial leadership, and the active labor of governors and mayors from both the traditional parties and MAS and Causa R contributed to a pressure for changes of the internal party structure.423 Interestingly, Bautista Urbaneja mentions AD as a successful example with respect to the ability to redesign its internal party structure. He adds that AD managed to change more or less generally its structure and routines and through this adaptation to decentralization the party successively abandoned its tradition of Leninist party structures [sic.].424 Following the same line of argumenting on AD’s ability to restructure with decentralization, a Venezuelan research colleague clarifies:

They [AD] succeeded in the sense that they sacrificed a great deal of the local party structure. It was sacrificed in a way that many of the local party base committées were eliminated.425

In the case of MAS, Tablante describes the initial party structure as wide, also in the national leadership, so that the majority of leaders, supporters

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422 Tablante, 2003 a: 219-221.
and friends could participate. When I ask him about possible resistance against decentralization from the central MAS leadership, he responds:

No, there was no [resistance] contra the process at theoretical level. Say, nobody opposed decentralization in the first instance, because it was a banner of MAS. But, of course, when push came to shove, there was some resistance. And when we say push came to shove we refer to the moment when we won the governorship of Aragua. Some sectors, very minoritarian though, thought that we should follow the directions of the national leadership in our government and action. But, I repeat, they were a minority. I ought to confess with plain frankness and gratitude that the historical leadership gave us green light, total confidence, and they liberated us from party discipline. I speak about persons like Teodoro Petkoff, Pompeyo Márquez and Freddy Muñoz. If there was some local resistance, this was due to that a lot of people did not understand what the ample front *Fuerza de Aragua* signified. They thought that we ought to go to elections only with slates that were approved by the party, maybe they felt substituted by these candidates of civil society which notwithstanding contributed with prestige and efficient credibility.426

**New actors and arenas for the political game**

Decentralization, political parties and unionism you say? Well, you are right about that, decentralization changed the political panorama a lot for us in the union movement. We have [with decentralization] a completely distinct institutional structure now, also within the political party. (…) Here in Maracay you have municipal mayors, at regional state level a governor of Aragua. In our case [MAS], we are used to being in opposition, both union and partywise. Now we have a governor of our own party, but at the same time the bureaucracy has changed and become more difficult for us unionists. Therefore we have created this office [see footnote] (…) Furthermore, with a centralized political and economic power not enough resources go down to the states. Decentralization then; for good and for bad.427

With the decentralization process, the party struggle at the local level has significantly changed character. Prior to the introduction of municipal and regional elections, there existed an unbroken and hierarchical chain from

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426 Tablante, 2003 b (My italics).
427 Cupertino Peña, interview, Maracay, 10 July 1997. The office Cupertino Peña is mentioning is the *Centro de Atención a los Trabajadores de Aragua* –CATA- (Attention Centre of Aragua Workers).
the President in successive steps down to the local party base committee and its bosses, based on an effective clientelistic network. The decentralization process has to a certain level implied that the workers and peasant unions at the local level could be said to have lost some power. In rural areas, decentralization has led to significant political changes, and one group that lost influence with the decentralization reform is the peasant union movement. Prior to decentralization, rural community leaders were more powerful in such way that they normally only responded to the political party [AD or COPEI most often]. Alternatively, they channeled political demands through a State institution either on the local or regional level (such as the Agrarian Reform Institute) or to the relevant Ministry at central government level. After 1989 all negotiations on municipal topics have to go through the mayor. Nevertheless, sometimes a governor can put up limits to the political freedom of action of the mayor, e.g., with state government programs that involve the municipal level.428

Decentralization gave representative power to neighborhood associations and the mayor, which in all affects the national unionism and partly the political parties negatively, even if the parties at the same time compete on these arenas. The negative aspects are particularly clear in the cases where the mayor or other political leader lacks ties to the traditional parties. The neighborhood associations with their relatively powerful position and representation in the juntas have evolved into the ”new typical political trampoline”, i.e., and the school and formation camp for future political leaders, including within the parties.429 Political scientist Gabrielle Guerón agrees upon that decentralization contributed to the loss of party discipline. New bases of political power have generated within this process, including the power within the political parties. Before the introduction of political decentralization, a little clique at the central party office in Caracas selected the candidatures for all Venezuelan states and municipalities. Nowadays negotiations are held between the center and regional and local leaders, also for the decision of posts with national relevance.430 At the same time, though, we cannot naturally say that the traditional parties have lost totally with decentralization, even if it without doubt has facilitated for other parties to enter the political and State arenas, as we have seen in the

429 Inteviews with, Zamora, Valencia, 16 June; Uribieta, Caracas, 20 May; Torres, Maracay, 29 May; Núñez, La Guaira, 2 August, all in 1997.
previous sections. Within all political parties, decentralization has led to internal reorganizations through the political openings that allow new local and regional political actors within the parties to enter with new demands, contributing to increased political pressure from below. The need of renovation of the traditional political parties was since years debated and seen as necessary in order to confront the credibility crisis within the parties and associated State institutions and social organizations (e.g. the CTV).

Regarding the appearance of the new politically influential actors, the appearance of the mayor figure is the most radical change in local (municipal) politics. In Venezuela the municipal government comprises a uni-personal executive head (the mayor) and a legislature (consejo municipal). The minimum of councilors is five (in municipalities with less than 15,000 inhabitants) and the maximum number is seventeen when the population is over a million. Before the decentralization reform there was no clear separation between executive and legislative responsibilities at the municipal level. The mayor is supposed to strengthen the municipal institutions, since he is the legitimate community representative and thus the natural spokesman on the municipal level.

The principal role of the mayor is to function as a mediator between the state and local social groups. This is exactly the traditional role of the parties in a society so theoretically, in the State-society discourse; we might ask if the mayor has taken over the role of the political parties. This assumption of mine is partly confirmed by the fact that an increasing number of mayors and governors present themselves as politically independent from the parties. At the same time, this tendency too is similarly an implication of the credibility crisis that today is marking the parties and the traditional trade union movement in Venezuela.

In the field of new important actors within the political society, Gómez Calcaño holds that organized middle sector groups that condemned corruption and the exaggerated partisan control of social activities were among the firsts to enter the political game at the municipal level after the initiation of the COPRE reforms. This political incorporation led to an

433 Confirmed through interviews with e.g. Garavini di Turno, Stockholm, 30 October, 1997.
association of ideas on decentralization and democratization and took more concrete form in Venezuelan media, where the pressure from civil society demanded a reduced role of the State and a struggle against partyarchy. Furthermore, from a social movement theoretical view, these advances of civil society had cumulative (or snowball, as argued in the theoretical part) effects, functioning as an alarm-bell for previously excluded social and political movements. When one NGO or alternative political party succeeds in entering the political/governmental arena, then others become motivated/stimulated and aware of possibilities-opportunities.

Now then, what had theoretically happened to the Venezuelan political society through the decentralization reform?

**Political Society after Decentralization**

If we compare this simplified panorama with the political society model in the first theoretical chapter, there are more possible “gates” (as they were called in the political opportunity structures section) to enter the political sphere. Outside actors have increased opportunities of access to government

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posts, and possibilities to positions of decision power within the State. As Guerón and Manchisi point out, there are now new sources of public posts available for the political parties [including for AD and COPEI].\textsuperscript{435} The stars in the civil society sphere can be candidatures for mayoralties and governorships, as well as social-political alliances behind the former. Civil society’s access to political society has increased. If we amplify the graphic following the “Simple polity model” with possible alliances between actors and distinctions between polity members, challengers (within political society) and outside actors, the scenario has become both more open and democratic, but also more complex and conflictive.

The Elections of 1992
In the elections of 1992 the trend of AD-COPEI domination continued, but with an internal redistribution of success between the two parties in favor of COPEI. Several analysts argue that the victories of opposition parties [including COPEI] to a high extent expressed the discontentment with the national government of Pérez.\textsuperscript{436} But, the financial aspects of party campaign support based on previous electoral results played in the hands of the traditional parties and thus constituted an economic handicap of new political movements. Simultaneously, decentralization did have impacts in creating regional power blocs within AD and COPEI.\textsuperscript{437} From one viewpoint the democratization objectives of decentralization as presented by e.g. Tocqueville, Hadenius, Diamond and Fox in the second theoretical chapter, thus partly failed. This is of course speaking in a national context, but in various states, like Aragua and Bolívar, MAS and Causa R repeated with Tablante and Velásquez. The MAS party expanded in both the regional and local elections, as seen in the table below.

\begin{table}[h]
\centering
\begin{tabular}{|c|c|c|}
\hline
Year & Region & Party \hline
1992 & Aragua & MAS \hline
1992 & Bolívar & MAS \hline
\end{tabular}
\end{table}

\textsuperscript{435} Guerón & Manchisi, 1996.
\textsuperscript{436} Hidalgo Trenado, 2002: 94-95.
\textsuperscript{437} See for example: Buxton, 2001: 123.
The MAS and COPEI parties stand out like winners in the 1992 elections, since both increased the numbers of governances and mayordomes. Also Causa R managed to grow on the municipal level and triumphed most surprisingly the Caracas mayoralty of Libertador, where Aristóbulo Istúriz won and governed until 1995. Causa R was the only party that managed to win alone without forming electoral alliances with other parties. The Causa R victories in Bolívar, as well as in the Libertador Municipality were reached without support of other parties. These victories functioned for Causa R as a catapult to be perceived as a national political force and alternative, particularly in the atmosphere of increasing discontent with the political establishment.

It is important to emphasize that the elections were held in the backwater of the “frustrated” attempts of Coup d’États in 1992. Several candidates for governorships and mayordomes took advantage of the general discontentment in their campaigns. The Venezuelans had started to use popular protest as a resource of political mobilization to a considerably larger extent since the Caracazo of 1989, and this tendency continued and deepened in 1992. It is likewise worth remarking that violent protests burst out in several states after the electoral results had been presented, since parts of the population suspected electoral fraud. In an analysis written a few months after the attempted Coup d’État, Kornblith and Levine concluded that criticisms towards the government and the party system escalated sharply, and that a group of new political actors succeeded in having their voices heard on the national political scene. One of these political voices, Carlos Tablante again, argues that decentralization saved

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438 Crisp & Levine, 1998: 46. Regarding the elections of governors, these had to be rerun in 1993 in two states due to disputes over the vote turnout. The first result had given AD 6 governances and COPEI 10.


the Venezuelan democratic system from collapsing in the backwater of the Caracazo.

This independence of the regions elevated the political consciousness of the citizens, as well as organized neighbors, civil society and the political parties. Likewise it permitted that an alternative of the kind that Chávez promoted eventually succeeded. The same high consciousness, the heightened politicization of the national and regional life, is what has impeded that certain sectors have aimed at radicalizing the current process, making it more authoritarian and anti-democratic, [which have] failed to instead confront such a formidable resistance by the regions and the organized civil society.441

Tablante (like me) thus sees openings of opportunities for more authoritarian political movements through decentralization. But, as emphasized, the firmness of civil society and the regional leadership here form a sort of barrier for any “too centralized and authoritarian” government (referring to the evolution from 1998 onwards of the Hugo Chávez government). The eventual impeachment of Pérez from the national presidency in 1993 most likely contributed to resemblances of a kind of confirmation of the political discontentment and a reasonability of the aggressive criticisms of the CAP government. Other voices hold that Pérez was sacrificed as a kind of political scapegoat in AD, after the economic package and exclusion of the major part of the party leadership.442 After having received the judicial decision, Pérez presented a self-defensive document in which he declared [as always] that he only had acted in the interest of the republic. He emphasized the early struggle for liberty, democracy, and democratization of the initial years in AD, and with respect to the more recent political evolution, his role in the decentralization process.

I gave all my efforts in the political reforms. In this way we began to convert the Presidency of the Republic from an absolute power to a moderate one. Four parties share, or have shared the power throughout this presidential period. Two elections of governors and mayors have taken place in these four years. I reclaim my special protagonism in this process of reforms, which is oriented towards the democratization of the power and of a national unmistakable participation.443

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442 My observations and interviews in Venezuela from 1993 onwards.
443 Pérez, 1993: 3.
As already indicated in the sections on the economic package and the Caracazo, Pérez himself thus takes a high score of credits for the democratization aspects and the de-alignment of the two-party system related to the decentralization process. The ties between decentralist reformist leaders such as Antonio Ledezma and Claudio Fermín likewise point in this direction, as well as the ex-President’s consciousness on international trends and his personal discontentment with the Alfaro-wing of AD.
FROM TWO-PARTYISM TO MULTI-PARTYISM
The economic deterioration was transformed into an open political crisis from 1989 onwards. AD and COPEI had managed to dominate Venezuelan politics relatively unquestioned for more than two decades, a lot thanks to their access to the petro-dollars and privileged position to distribute these resources among the population and interest groups. At the same time, particularly AD (to certain level also COPEI) was so strongly identified with the struggle against the dictatorship in the 1950’s. As the economic crisis deepened, the traditional political leadership was among the first to be blamed by the citizens, as for the decreasing socio-economic conditions.

Venezuelan Protest Cycles
From this perspective and in the context of deepening economic crisis, the possibilities of mobilization and probabilities of success increased for “new alternative” movements or parties. These new movements can accordingly in a situation of crisis be perceived as appealing to the citizens, which also blame the traditional politicians for their own decreasing socio-economic situation and the unequal distribution of the Venezuelan economic richness. This socio-economic deterioration among the urban poor and lower middle class led to feelings of ignorance and abandonment from the AD and COPEI parties, which had failed to allocate resources to these groups. For this reason an increasing number of Venezuelans chose to vote for new political movements, e.g. Causa R, who promised to get rid of the AD and COPEI hegemonic system.444

The perception among Venezuelans of politics and politicians changed drastically from the 1980’s onwards. Sociologist Jaime Miró Miró describes [with a risk of generalizing] that the world of politics in Venezuela (and particularly parties and politicians) has created an idea among citizens that the political party is a most efficient way of getting access to power, privileges and resources of distinct types. This has been converted into a sectarian, anti-democratic, closed, clientelist and extortionate organization, which according to this idea becomes necessary to reach individual advances and social and economic status. Furthermore, Miró Miró transmits the picture that Venezuelans have of politicians as people of much talk and demagogic, opportunistic, corrupt and false characters, which take

advantage of the party and of the government for individual purposes and not to serve the well being of the nation. Paradoxically, he adds, this personality has become a cultural example in several popular groups of how to reach social status.\textsuperscript{445} Coppedge suggests a kind of complicity between the two traditional parties, since they acted like if the Punto Fijo Pact included a secret agreement on the prohibition prosecution for corruption.\textsuperscript{446} Daniel Levine uses some of Tarrow’s ideas of political opportunity structures, and he holds that prehistorically the protest cycles in Venezuela have no unique point of departure or vehicle of control.

Protests and challenges pop up here and there, not just in response to the ”exhaustion of the model” but also in search of voice, expression, and participation. (...) Some of these efforts persist and consolidate while others fade, but... they share a core political agenda. It is as if a mirror were held up to the party system and the rules by which it lived. If we recall the centralized, hierarchical character of the party system, and its reliance on heavily financed state-party links with powerful leaders making deals behind closed doors, the contrast is all the more striking. Protesters and reformers seek greater access and participation, and make their case in campaigns against corruption and elite impunity. They insist on accountability and demand transparency--deals concluded in public and accessible to public scrutiny. Nothing could be more contrary to the operating rules of the puntofijista system.\textsuperscript{447}

In an analysis of a [classified] Venezuelan protest cycle between 1989 and 1993, Margarita López Maya makes a relevant distinction between violent versus creative protest action. The first kind, the violent and confrontative way of protest, has been manifested in Venezuela increasingly since 1989 and can be illustrated with the cases of invasion or blockings of public or private space (e.g. land, buildings or roads), and the more violent and chaotic one of disturbances. Neighbors, union organizations, and even local or regional political leaders have often organized the invasions (or blockings). The land invasions have normally been protagonized by people of the poor, marginalized sectors. The disturbances, on the other hand, have normally been initiated as “normal” student protests (even if it is true that normally the student marches do not end up in disturbances and street clashes with the police). But, the student protests that included the presence and action of “encapuchados” (militants that use a hood to cover the face)

\textsuperscript{445} Miró Miró, 2001: 156. See also, Canache, 2002.

\textsuperscript{446} Coppedge, 2000: 6.

\textsuperscript{447} Levine, 2000.
always ended up in riot-like disturbances. The other kind of popular protest, the creative one, is illustrated by more traditional action repertoires, such as protest marches, mass meetings and organized blackouts. In Venezuela the “cacerolazos” (protest marches with banging of pots) have increased as a mobilization form to protest against the government and its politics.448

4F and Decentralization

The Caracazo riots and the popular sympathy that Hugo Chávez and other rebel officers enjoyed after the coup attempts were clear manifestations of the general political and social discontent that characterized Venezuelans after a decade of decreasing socio-economic conditions. As argued in one of the first analytical publications that focused the evolution of the MBR-200 and the factors that contributed to the critical societal and political situation, for the first time since democratization in 1958 the Venezuelan middle class had experienced economic decline. This middle class consisted of the children of working class that thanks to the educational revolution succeeded in a positive change of socio-economic status. These changes were also apparent for the multi-class Armed Forces, and since the economic crisis deepened, militaries lost previous privileges. Together with the miserable public services and decline in salaries, the corruption of the political and economic leadership made an explosive mixture.449

One of the scholars that studied decentralization and the political party system, Penfold-Becerra contributes with a most interesting and evident direct link between the military coup attempts in 1992 and the decentralization process. Between 1989 and 1992, not single responsibility transference was approved, despite the demands and pressure by the governors of Aragua, Anzoátegui, Bolívar, Carabobo and Falcón, some of the most important Venezuelan states as for industrialization and urbanization. But, after the coup attempt in February 1992,450 opposition politicians took advantage of the new political climate provoked and put in evidence by the coup attempt. Two of the most forceful critics were the governors of Aragua and Bolívar, Carlos Tablante and Andrés Velásquez, from MAS and Causa R respectively.451 A further strong link between the

448 López Maya, 1999.
450 Popularly, the coup attempt is called 4F, after the date it took place; 4th of February. 4F is also used to labor the inner circle closest to Chávez in MBR-200 and MVR.
coup attempt and decentralization is provided by MAS leader Pedro Mosqueda:

What partly impedes the materialization of the Coup´d État to triumph the 4th of February is precisely the presence of all governors, so Chávez does not reach the success that he later would obtain. The coup by Chávez was directed against the central power, not against the decentralized powers, and the decentralized powers acted immediately against the military surrender, thus withdrawing its [potential] political support. Chávez ends up isolated, not only internationally, but also isolated by the regions, because he seizes with a data that unexpectedly was not included in the attempt. He realized it like other [coup]s of the Venezuelan history, against the central power (...) Hitting against the central power he encounters that there exist autónomous power in the regions, and this autónomous regional power acted immediately as a contention bloc. I think that this is a very important data to understand the failure of the February 4th coup attempt.452

The argumentation of Mosqueda demonstrates the institutional weakening of the national executive, as well as the huge differences between a centralized and a decentralized political system. This distinction thus became decisive also in a moment of a military rebellion. Furthermore, the political party system had changed so much already with decentralization, implicating that the party that formed government (AD) no longer controlled the regions. A strong multi-dimensional link between decentralization, party system and the coup attempt emerges through the above reasoning, also confirming the theoretical points of departure stating that one process or movement seldom develops alone.

Considering the forthcoming increasing popularity of Hugo Chávez, it is important to underline that the rebel officials behind the coup attempt, led by then Lieutenant Colonel Chávez, managed to get a message through Venezuelan television before getting arrested. The social consciousness of the Chávez movement apparently appealed to large parts of the Venezuelan population. In the Senate, ex-President Rafael Caldera defended the rebel officers (in an atmosphere of lynching feelings among many of the AD and COPEI leaders), something that together with his anti-traditionalism approach later in 1993 would play in his favor in the presidential elections.

Reconsidering the crucial State’s strength condition within the political opportunity structures, the deepening economic crisis obviously debilitated the State and the governing political party. Popular discontentment was also reflected in the following local and regional elections for governor and the recently installed post as mayor. The Causa R took great advantage of the political discontent that culminated in the violent riots of 1989, thus contributing to a continuation of the Venezuelan tradition of “punishment voting” (voto castigo), i.e., not vote for a candidate or party, but against the least wanted electoral option. Margarita López Maya holds that a protest cycle (as described by Tarrow et. al.) developed within the Venezuelan society from the Caracazo in February 1989 until the national elections of December 1993 when the bipartisan hegemony by AD and COPEI was broken.\textsuperscript{453} To illustrate the political discontentment, one survey made in 1992 demonstrated that only 34 % of the Venezuelans actively defended the political parties and saw them as key organizations for democracy and instruments to resolve the crisis. A 55 % on the other hand, believed that the best solutions to the crisis were to be found outside the party system.\textsuperscript{454}

\textbf{Attempts to ameliorate Decentralization}

When Carlos Andrés Pérez had been impeached, an interim government led by Senator Ramon J. Velásquez took over in 1993 (elected in Congress). During the interim period of Velásquez until new elections were held in December the same year, decentralization probably enjoyed its highest recognition so far from the Central Government. Among others, an amendment to the Law of Decentralization (LODDT) was passed through a presidential decree. The new government recognized that a more detailed and complete revision was needed to define the procedures of transmission of services and competencies to the regional and municipal levels, as well as the administrative responsibilities of each level.\textsuperscript{455} Nevertheless, the law remains far from clear regarding which economic and financial guarantees the municipal and regional governments should have. In the amendment of the LODDT in the section on the transfer of financial resources from the central government to the regional state authorities it is declared that:

The responsible agencies of the national Power ought to [\textit{deberán}] contribute with the financing of the transferred services via the yearly assignation of budget resources to the

\textsuperscript{453} López Maya, 1999.
\textsuperscript{454} Alvarez, 2003: 150.
states, which will be calculated with the initial base in the amount of the resources
dedicated to finance the real cost of the transferred service included in the Law of Budget
of the moment of transference.456

Institutionally, too, the interim government of Velásquez showed great
ambitions with creation of new inter-governmental State agencies. Political
scientist Maria Milagros Matheus presents a list of official organisms that
function to facilitate the inter-governmental relationships in Venezuela
(probably at its peak in 1993):

1) The Minister of Decentralization (responsible for coordinating mechanisms
between the relevant ministries and the distinct political-territorial levels. This
ministry was suspended in 1994.)

2) The National Decentralization Commission, with responsibility of support,
planning and evaluation of decentralization and deconcentration programs.

3) Ministerial organisms for decentralization (with the task of orienting and
coordinating the decentralization processes within the distinct ministries.)

4) The Convention of Governors, a heritage from the Constitution of 1961 and
confirmed in the Law of Decentralization (1989), although not redesigned
enough to meet the new political and institutional conditions that appeared
through the reforms of direct elections of governors.

5) Territorial Council of Government. Established by Presidential decree in 1993, it
has the function to take advantage of the experiences of the group of governors,
a specialist nominated by the President, and the Minister of Internal Affairs, in
order to co-ordinate the relationships between the central executive government
and the states.

6) The Association of Governors (formed in 1993 by initiative of the governors to
better protect the interests of the state governorships, and to improve their
relationships with the central government, the mayoralities and civil society).

7) Regional Institutions for the regulation of relations between the federal states and
municipalities.

8) Committees of Planning and Coordination (integrated in each state by the
governor, some governorship executives, the mayors, and the directors of
National State institutions on the regional level) with the objective to promote
and assure the administrative collaboration and coordination between the
municipalities, the states and the central government.

456 LODDT, amendment by decree No 3.250, 18th of November 1993, Chapter V, art. 17.
9) The National Council of Mayors (also created in 1993 by Presidential decree, and with the objective to promote and improve the relationships between the municipal political power and the national government).

10) The regional COPRE:s, with the objectives to function as an information channel between the centralized COPRE and the states, and to coordinate the decentralization processes at the national and regional levels.  

Although, Maria Matheus admits that despite the massive efforts to create new institutions for the “new political reality” brought forward by decentralization, several institutional problem fields remain, and also the created institutions for intergovernmental relations and cooperation have generally not functioned well. First of all, some of the mentioned institutions are heavily centralist, for example the territorial Council of Government and the National Council of Mayors. There are also confusions in the states on the authorities and functioning of the national and regional institutions, also in the states where decentralization has functioned relatively better (as in Aragua and Carabobo), due to the creation of several institutions with very similar functions.

In November of 1993 the Intergovernmental Fund of Decentralization – FIDES- (Fondo Intergubernamental para la Descentralización) was created as an autonomous institution connected to the Ministry of Internal Affairs. A main objective of FIDES is to balance the inequalities between rich and poor municipalities and states, by providing the poorer with economic support through funds. Besides, FIDES is also responsible of evaluation, approval and partial financing of municipal and state projects.

Both national politicians and governors have questioned the redistributive and rebalancing strategies of FIDES. The Carabobo governor Henrique Salas Feo of Proyecto Carabobo opposes the attempts to balance the distribution of funds to the states as recommended by FIDES, and as a measure in the governments poverty reduction program. Salas Feo argues that the distributional system based on the criterions of territorial size and poverty level is unfair in such way that a great deal of the economic resources will go to states with poorly developed administration.

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458 Ibid.: 385-386.
459 Interview with FIDES co-ordinator Márquez, Caracas, 8 June, 2001; Arenas & Mascareño, 1997: 42-43.
suggests that the distribution should be made according to the population size of the states in order to combat poverty more efficiently.\textsuperscript{460}

The Presidential Elections of 1993

Since the introduction of direct elections of mayors and governors, the results of these elections have served the bigger parties as a thermometer before the presidential ones (if they are close to each other in time). So also in the presidential elections of 1993, where several of the candidates for the presidency were successful and popular state governors, most notably Andrés Velásquez of Causa R, but also Oswaldo Alvarez Paz of COPEI and the Zulia state. Claudio Fermín of AD is also a representative of the political profiles that grew stronger with decentralization, as former mayor of Caracas Libertador. Worth recalling is that Fermín stemmed from the perecista or reformista faction of AD. Both Alvarez Paz and Fermín campaigned with pro-market economic programs. Within COPEI, decentralization has clearly changed the power structures of the party. Before the presidential elections of 1993, when Alvarez Paz was chosen to represent the party, the most influential factor in that decision was his record as an honest and efficient governor of the Zulia state.\textsuperscript{461} Reconsidering the argumentation of Jonathan Fox on decentralization as a “good school” for future national political leaders, Venezuela thus seems to be a good example. However, the only non-decentralist candidate won, although with the support of decentralist MAS, as seen in the table:

\textsuperscript{460} \textit{O’Donoghue, 1997.}

\textsuperscript{461} Arenas & Mascareño, 1997: 44; Coppedge, 1998: 16.
Presidential Elections of 1993

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate</th>
<th>Party</th>
<th>Vote of total</th>
<th>Congress votes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Rafael Caldera</td>
<td>Conv./MAS</td>
<td>30,5 %</td>
<td>24,4 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Claudio Fermín</td>
<td>AD</td>
<td>23,6 %</td>
<td>28,8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oswaldo Alvarez Paz</td>
<td>COPEI</td>
<td>22,7 %</td>
<td>27,2 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andrés Velásquez</td>
<td>Causa R</td>
<td>21,9 %</td>
<td>19,6 %</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

With the victory of the Caldera alliance in 1993, AD and COPEI lost control over the presidency for the first time since 1958. First of all a fragmentation and a heavy volatility of the party system is apparent if we compare with the election results of 1998 (when AD and COPEI together captured around 93 % of the votes (AD 53 and COPEI 40). Molina catalogizes the period from 1993 a polarized and de-institutionalized pluralism. The difference in obtained votes is indeed almost minimal between AD, COPEI and Causa R. Caldera’s party alone would have ended fourth, but with the 10 % of MAS and the alliance with other mainly Leftist parties, they gathered enough support to win. Julia Buxton holds that Causa R was perceived as a dangerous threat to AD and COPEI, with their electoral promises of radical reforms of the political structures. “In that instance, electoral fraud and changes in the electoral strategies of AD and COPEI averted a potential LCR [La Causa Radical] victory.”

Nevertheless, returning to what could be assumed to be a shaky government coalition (a former COPEI leader backed up by MAS and other Leftist groups). Even if the Caldera alliance formed government, there existed a tacit and sometimes open alliance between AD and Caldera that signified that the AD was allowed spaces in State institutions and administration, i.e. protected by Caldera. So, despite being officially independent, Caldera was not in practice directly hostile to the traditional political parties (even if

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463 My conclusion and Crisp, 2000: 45.
465 Buxton, 2001: 5.
466 Ellner, 1997.
he won the election among others with his anti-traditionalism discourse and the defense of the coup-makers around Chávez in 1992).

George Philip reveals that a few months after taking position in 1994, Caldera closed the Congress in order to sit down and negotiate with AD’s parliamentary leaders. At one moment, Caldera pronounced to an intimate parliamentary associate that the country needed strong political parties, and that he wanted to help AD, since he virtually had succeeded in destroying his old party (COPEI).467 Myers demonstrates how Caldera aimed at isolating and marginalizing his “ungrateful children” in COPEI, after being himself outmaneuvered in the party. He offered AD’s Alfaro Ucero a deal, providing them the necessary patronage to satisfy their clients. Alfaro Ucero (who agreed to the deal) had to secure on his behalf that AD supported the Caldera government in Congress. Here through, with Myers’ words, “AD gave its blessing to Caldera’s plan to dismember COPEI.”468 Additionally, in this new situation AD and COPEI together held a majority in Congress during the mandate. Through this new situation both AD and COPEI were extremely dependent on regional and local alliances with other parties. As Philip puts it, they now fitted better for the epithet “traditional” parties, rather than “dominant”. They still controlled the Congress, most governorships, mayoralties, much of the State apparatus, and “a good deal of the money”.469

The above reveals that despite the relative loss in popular support of AD, they managed to remain a political force. If we now put aside the possible fraud and manipulations against Causa R, there were some politicians that would have preferred amplifying the coalition behind Caldera, i.e. also including Causa R. MAS leader Teodoro Petkoff, Minister of Planning in Caldera’s government, was one of these disillusioned. He blamed Causa R:s stubbornness for not having out-maneuvered AD once and for all, and at the same time Petkoff offers an explanation on the eventual AD-Caldera relationship:

Caldera is the last opportunity to go from one political order to a new one in peace, if not this government there is no alternative. LCR is not the alternative; maybe it will be a

469 Philip, 2000: 28-30 (My italics).
madman. This is why I think it would have been good for LCR to support Caldera, as it would kill AD and COPEI, Caldera was forced to give oxygen to AD. Caldera has been obliged to survive and get support; LCR did not understand that, so if AD is still alive it is because of LCR, Caldera was alone he had only two small parties.470

The parliamentary alliance between Caldera and AD can in this context be seen as rather contradictory. To confront this situation, COPEI, MAS and Causa R allied in Congress, in the “triple-alianza”. Andrés Velásquez defends the Causa R standpoint and accordingly the criticism from Petkoff:

Parliamentary struggle is not my world, but it remains clear that this alliance [the triple-alianza] had the purpose to deplace AD and to achieve a change in the Parliament. Now, it was never planned that Causa R should assume bureaucratic roles.471

Returning to the decentralization context, Caldera was of the opinion that the governors and the mayors repeated the same vices that were rooted in the centralized system, including the practice of clientelism and corruption. He called them Reyezuelos (small kings) and expressed doubt about the convenience of decentralization. Although, while being accused of being centralist, Caldera clarified that he was convinced by the necessity of decentralization, but that it ought to be brought forward in a good manner, well orientated and correctly defined towards the good of the people.472 The son of the President, Senator Juan José Caldera (Convergencia) likewise entered the debate against the governors and emphasized the possible risks with decentralization. He asserted the necessity to carefully follow the process of decentralization, but not to forget that the strengthening of the national identity had higher priority, which requires solidaric work between the political-territorial levels. If decentralization should be understood as the transfer of resources and power concentration in the hands of a few, but without responsibilities, then decentralization would become a risky business and a serious threat against the national integrity and development.473

472 Rafael Caldera interviewed in El Universal, 1 March, 1997 (Sección Política).
473 Juan José Caldera interviewed in: El Universal, 1 February, 1997 (Sección Política).
The political climate of debate on the future of decentralization got into a red heat. A verbal war initiated between Caldera’s Minister of Decentralization, José Guillermo Andueza, and constitutionalist Allan Brewer Carías, who held the same cabinet post in the interim government of Ramón J. Velásquez, both blaming each other for failures in the field of decentralization. Andueza labeled Brewer Carías and the most persistent opposition governors “decentralization fundamentalists”, and added that with no right they kept accusing him for being centralist. Further he argued that a true fiscal decentralization was necessary for the country, but “unfortunately it is not possible in this moment.”

Ex-governor Andrés Velásquez expressed in 1997:

It cannot be that we have a Minister of Decentralization who actually is against it as a process and in fact does almost everything to combat the ambitions of the governors.

Rafael “Fucho” Tovar, governor of Nueva Esparta for COPEI, reacted against the Caldera accusations and responded that:

We do not want to be neither caciques nor small kings (...) We are open for dialogue. Decentralization is a necessity. [We want] a decentralization that is well understood and responsible, without caciquismos nor partidization of the competences that are transferred to the regions.

Buxton demonstrates the extreme level of vulnerability of the decentralization process under Caldera. Ramón J. Velásquez had launched decrees for the permission of governorships and mayoralties to control the value-aggregated taxes (-IVA- Impuesto al valor agregado), but Caldera suspended the power transfer. Likewise the central government delayed the nomination of the Decentralization Fund’s (FIDES) board, leaving a

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474 The Ministry of Decentralization was abolished during the Caldera mandate. Andueza continued as Minister of Domestic Affairs and finally in charge of the Ministry of the Presidential Secretariate.


476 Interview with Velásquez, Caracas, 31st of July, 1997. Confirmed also through interviews with, González Cruz, Mérida, 11 June, 1999; Benítez, Puerto Ordáz, 29 June, 1997; Delgado, Maracay, 25 June, 1997; Machuca, Puerto Ordaz, 29 June, 1997; Ojeda, 2 June, 2001; Rodríguez San Juan, Catia La Mar, 10 May, 2000.

477 Fucho Tovar interviewed in El Universal, 1 March, 1997 (My italics).
procedural vacuum for the financial aspects of decentralization.\textsuperscript{478} Evaluating the mandate of Caldera, Myers classifies it as \textit{a failure by almost any standard}. The economic deterioration deepened and the party system lost the last traces of its legitimacy. The deal between Caldera and Alfaro Ucero provided AD only with short-term resources, but in the longer run AD was weakened, since the citizens perceived the party as part of the unpopular government of Caldera.\textsuperscript{479} The decline and lack of credibility of AD and COPEI together with the pressure from the “new” Venezuelan civil and political societies had prepared an opening for a new political panorama.

\textbf{Did Causa R win in 1993?}

Now, returning to the day of the presidential election. Like Buxton indicated above, many critical voices state that really Andrés Velásquez would have triumphed in the 1993 presidential elections, but manipulations, sabotages and burning of electoral ballot boxes (\textit{actas}) changed the turnout. As López Maya expresses: “in this country the election system does not function well when the differences are small.”\textsuperscript{480}

We believe that we won the elections with Andrés [Velásquez], although, due to electoral manipulations and lack of courage among some of our leading militants, we missed that opportunity.\textsuperscript{481}

A few years after the 1993 elections, Velásquez himself was still secure on the true outcome:

I won that electoral process and they set up a trap for me. \textsuperscript{482}

Some critics hold that AD militants with access to the electoral centers changed entire boxes of supposed Causa R votes for AD ballots to not make

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{Buxton} Buxton, 2001: 116.
\bibitem{Myers} Myers, 2003: 24 (My italics).
\bibitem{López Maya} López Maya, interview, Caracas, 4 June, 1996.
\bibitem{Albornóz} Albornóz, interview, 21 March, 2003 & confirmed through earlier interview with Benítez, Caracas, 15 December, 1998.
\bibitem{Velásquez} Velásquez, interviewed in El Universal, 23 February, 2003.
\end{thebibliography}
the electoral humiliation so hard.483 Although, I do not aim at any statement saying that without fraud Causa R would have won. But, as several anonymous informants expressed:

On one of the Venezuelan television channels, they have the tradition on the days of elections to show a picture of the winning candidate in the beginning of the vignette of the program, in 1993 Andrés Velásquez appeared first.484

But, one academic authority on Venezuelan electoral studies, José Molina, holds that:

No, that is not true, Caldera won, no doubt about it. However people keep saying that Andrés had more votes, but even if some traps were set, some ballot boxes changed etc., the total amount of valid votes for Caldera and the alliance was enough to beat Causa R.485

Indeed the hypothetical departure of the present study would have been easier to defend if the radicals had reached the presidency, a sort of schoolbook example of a political movement going from micro to macro level and from protest to proposal (using the terminology of Fals Borda). Former Causa R deputy José Albornóz agrees on my assumptions that decentralization since 1989 signified an opportunity for them to enter the political system from below, that is, the municipalities and the regional states. “Doing a good job there in Bolívar, we got national reputation as an option to the traditional corrupt elites [AD and COPEI].”486

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MAS & Causa R: From Micro to Macro

Reconsidering the bottom-up approach of Fals Borda, when a social or political movement goes from the micro to the macro political level and from protest to proposal, the rise of Causa R appears almost a schoolbook example. Even if mobilization outside Bolívar (i.e., in Caracas) had initiated much earlier, it was first when Andrés Velásquez won the governorship that the movement sensed a more genuine power capability and that: “Yes, indeed it could be possible for La Causa Radical to win a presidential election.”

José Albornóz recalls how the banner “From Guayana to the rest of Venezuela” was born, himself in charge of the mobilizations in Catia (Caracas). The reputation of the Causa R regional leadership spread around the nation and the party enjoyed great media coverage.

In the national elections of 1993, Causa R succeeded in having 40 candidates elected as deputies in Congress and five Senators in the Parliament, which represented 21.1% of the seats, compared to 23.9 for AD, 22.8 for COPEI, 13.6 for Convergencia and 10.8 for MAS. Despite this, at the national political level, Causa R seemed to resign relatively after the presidential elections and internal conflicts were already apparent within the party. As an example, two of the Causa R mayors, Aristóbulo Istúriz in Caracas and Clemente Scotto in the Caroní municipality in Bolívar at times experienced opposition from municipal councilors of their own party. Besides, neither one of the Causa R mayors received much support of the regional or national leadership of the party. Notwithstanding, both of them succeeded in achieving important and positive changes within the municipalities. They launched a model of participatory democracy and a deepening of decentralization through a parroquialization of the municipalities and likewise provided instruments for practical cooperation at the neighborhood level.

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489 Political Database of the Americas, 2000.
490 Clemente Scotto was re-elected in 1992 and in 1995 his wife, Pastora Medina (sister of Pablo Medina) was elected mayor of Caroni.
491 López Maya, 1996.
International analysts have compared the appearance of Causa R with the Brazilian Workers’ Party, PT (Partido dos Trabalhadores).\footnote{Hellinger, 1996: 110. For a deeper analysis of the Brazilian experiences of this ”new” way of local democracy and government, see: Abers, 2000; Avritzer, 2002: 135-170.} Like the PT, Causa R got heavy attention for their open budget and development meetings during the regional government of Velásquez in Bolívar. In fact, Orlando Fals Borda launches Causa R as one example of how a local Leftist movement decided to go from the micro to the macro level and from protest to proposal.\footnote{Fals Borda, 1992: 307.} Like Andrés Velásquez (and the PT in Brazil), the Causa R mayors in Caroni and Caracas organized open public meetings and discussion tables, also on budget matters and priorities of the municipality and the neighborhoods. Important efforts were also made in the public municipal administration to make it more efficient, including ambitions to clean it from clientelistic and corrupt traditions.

Furthermore, the trade union movement of Causa R -Nuevo Sindicalismo- (born in Bolívar) had managed to take over the control of several Venezuelan unions since the late 1980’s, also in other important sectors where AD traditionally had dominated. Both the Causa R party and its union movement grew nationally, and not only in Bolívar and Caracas. Regionwise, considering the presidential elections of 1993, Causa R grew in Aragua from 0,3 % of the federal unity votes for the presidency in 1988 to 31,9 % in 1993. In Bolívar, not surprisingly, the figures went up to 49,6 % in 1993, compared to 1,2 in 1988, figure that still was the highest score region wise for the party.\footnote{López Maya, 1994: 48.} Causa R reached the people also outside the trade union arena. In 1989, Andrés Velásquéz was elected governor of the state of Bolívar in the first regional elections. During his governance periods, Velásquez continued with the traditional local base-level speeches that he had initiated at Sidor in the 1970’s. Nevertheless, it is important to emphasize that the success of Causa R in Bolivar and eventually nationally was far from a one-man-job. One neighborhood association leader of the party in Bolivar argues: ”The relationship between the party, the unions and the neighborhood councils is very straight”, it is hereby hard to separate the activities of each branch.\footnote{Saracuál, interview, Puerto Ordaz, 29 June, 1997.} Hellinger suggests that Causa R is more of a
“quasi-party, quasi-movement”, or as Maneiro himself labeled it “a complex of organizations.”

MAS has been the nation’s third party, but was nationally replaced by Causa R in popularity after the elections of 1993. However, in the same elections, MAS was the first party to support Rafael Caldera in the Convergencia alliance. MAS contributed with nearly 11% of the votes that led to the victory of Caldera. It is important to mention that before these elections, MAS had fused with the MIR party, that is, the political party that was formed through the split of AD in 1963. The MAS decentralization of party leadership also contributed to a deepened ideological division of the party. While the faction of Carlos Tablante in Aragua has promoted continued regional leadership, other party leaders are of the opinion that this decentralization has gone too far. Tablante has been harshly criticized for, among others, having come to terms with certain elite groups in Aragua in order to reinforce his regional leadership. Moreover, one can also question the consistency of the party, since MAS has allied with AD in some states and with COPEI in others. Considering the unionism and the MAS strength in Aragua, the trade union movement has lost parts of its previous power in favor of other social movement activities. José Torres states that the strong appearance of neighborhood associations has weakened the trade union movement, also in Aragua where the union affiliation has been relatively high in the Venezuelan context.

For political scientist Luis Salamanca, there is something paradoxical with the current situation of MAS, growing on the regional level with state projects, while at the same time the party enjoys little support for its national politics. The participation of MAS within the Caldera coalition can at first sight be seen as a temporarily beneficial situation, but in the long run the party will have to go its own way. Furthermore, the MAS support of the Caldera coalition between 1994 and 1998 led to increasing discontent within the party, especially since Caldera has carried through reforms backed up principally by AD in the Congress. But, in a broader perspective, decentralization, and the general acceptance of the regional leadership functioned to strengthen the MAS party, and politicians like Carlos

496 Hellinger, 1996: 125.
Tablante have later on reached national and including international posts. In the same context, somewhat contradicting, Ellner concludes that:

MAS have been a victim of the very decentralization, which brought to the fore regional leaders who have so ably vied for control of one third of the nation’s governorships. In the name of decentralization, MAS state leaders have refused to accept national evaluation, let alone supervision of key policies and decisions.\textsuperscript{500}

In an interview with Tablante I received the following answer regarding what decentralization meant for MAS:

It signified the possibility to reach a more authentic power at the executive level (mayordomes and governorships), to be able to develop a leadership in favor of the citizens, but of course it also favored the party. (…) Paradoxically, we benefited from what we had proposed. Since the late 1970’s, MAS insisted on the direct elections of governors and mayors, as a part of a necessary decentralization process, that should include not only the structures of the executive and other powers, but also the [structure] of the political parties.\textsuperscript{501}

Regarding the modus operandi at the regional levels, both Tablante in Aragua and Velásquez in Bolívar have protagonized protest marches and manifestations, not only in their respective states but also in Caracas. These protest marches have been organized together with neighborhood associations, trade union organizations, municipality leaders, peasants, cultural associations and entrepreneurs. The motives of the marches have been, for example, protests against the increased price levels and costs of living (e.g. on gasoline and public transport as before the Caracazo). Together with nationally respected cultural personalities, artists, writers and journalists, Tablante was also one of the key personalities in a march against the corruption that took place in 1989. The manifestation is remembered as “la marcha de los pendejos” (the march of the jerks) and the main slogan was “no soy corrupto y soy pendejo” (I am not corrupt and therefore I am a jerk).\textsuperscript{502}

\textsuperscript{500} In, Buxton, 2001: 124 (Decentralization with “z” by me).
\textsuperscript{501} Tablante, 2003 b: 1.
\textsuperscript{502} López Maya, 1999: 226. The initiative to the march was taken after an appearance in television by Venezuelan author and political legend Arturo Uslar Pietri who pronounced
It has to be recognized, though, that similarly Velásquez and Tablante, as well as Alvarez Paz enjoyed national political reputation even before they ran for the governorships in 1989 and 1992 [Velásquez mainly for his struggles within the steel workers union in Bolivar]. On the other hand, other nationally established politicians have aspired governorships without success, as Paciano Padrón and Abdón Vivas Terán (both COPEI), Héctor Alonzo López (AD), Argelia Laya (MAS) and Pablo Medina (Causa R).503

**Why the Leftist parties spearhead Decentralization**

It might not be so surprising that parties like MAS and Causa R have been spearheaded the Venezuelan decentralization. Not only there have Leftist parties reached popular support and electoral gains. For instance in Mexico and Uruguay new parties emerged as a popular response to what Jorge Domínguez and Jeanne Kinney Giraldo define as “the arrogance of the national parties and the predominance within older parties of an apparently self-perpetuating leadership – a classic crisis of representation.” Similarly, the authors draw a parallel to Coppedge’s partyarchy, including Venezuela in the same trends of these phenomena of crisis of traditional parties and the emergence of new parties.504

In Bolivia too, Left-wing parties have increased influence at the municipal level and later also reached attention and support at the national level. For instance, the Bolivian socialist party –MAS- (*Movimiento Al Socialismo*), represented by *cocalero* peasant and quechua leader Evo Morales, who reached the second place in the elections of President of the Republic in 2002. In Ecuador, a story similar to that of Hugo Chávez in Venezuela, Colonel Lucio Gutiérrez formed an alliance around his party *Sociedad Patriótica 21 de Enero*, consisting in indigenous movements and other societal sectors and eventually won the presidential elections of 2002. Like Chávez in Venezuela, Gutiérrez had previously (the 21st of January in 2000) led an attempted Coup d’État, with strong popular support, which he later benefited from when founding the party. Gutiérrez has expressed admiration of Chávez, and in political (and populistic) discourse they indeed share a lot, to punish the guilty ones of the crisis, to combat himself on some recent corruption scandals and he referred to the honest people as being considered “*pendejos*” (Zapata, interview, Caracas, 18 May, 1997).


504 Domínguez & Kinney Giraldo, 1996: 10 (My italics).
corruption, to promise a more equal re-distribution etc, alluding directly to the marginalized sectors of the population. In the field of decentralization, Gutiérrez (like Chávez) calls for a more participatory democracy.

We do not want a political, economic and administrative centralization. Our government will take part with all the autonomous organisms, provincial and municipal councils, and parroquial juntas. They constitute the genuine expression of true democracy, the manifest need among the people of a true reason to exist for the fatherland.505

The Latin American Leftist party that Causa R is most frequently compared with in the context of unionism and decentralization is, as mentioned, the Brazilian Partido dos Trabalhadores –PT-, which in the presidential elections of 2002 triumphed with José Ignacio Lula da Silva and now form government. In the classic Utopia Unarmed, Jorge Castañeda has studied the historical evolution of the Latin American Leftist parties and holds that: "As the left wins mayoralties, it becomes more convinced of the virtues of decentralization and municipal democracy. As it bestows greater priority upon these issues, it will in all likelihood win more towns and cities."506 Interestingly, Castañeda mentions that even former guerrilla fighters [like some of the MAS and Causa R activists] are convinced of the importance of municipal democracy.507 Although, generally speaking it was first in the 1980’s when Left-wing parties recognized and started to take advantage of decentralization in the continent.508 The discussions of reforms of the political system was far from new in Venezuela, the MEP party argued by the early and mid-1980’s:

Since the 1940’s, more concretely during the 1945-48 period, (...) this discussion and conflict processes that have gone through the government party [AD], and that still not have concluded (...). We do not consider backing even a millimeter of the steps we are taking in favor of the direct elections of state governors. In this direction we have prepared projects of laws (...) and we work to collect more than 2,000 signatures (...) to be able to introduce that project to the Chamber of Deputies early in 1986(...) The

507 Ibid.
508 Rivera, 1996: 75-81.
election of governors will be reality more sooner than later, but it will be the product of a constant struggle and persistent popular pressure.  

In a Latin American context, the evolution of the M-19 guerrilla movement in Colombia and its political partidization in 1989 constitutes an example of a transition from illegal and violent movement to an official and legal political organization. The Sandinista movement in Nicaragua, as well as the FMLN (Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front) in El Salvador, are other examples of how previously armed groups decided to form parties to compete in political elections. As for the traditional elitist characteristic in Latin American parties, this is most valid for the development of Left-wing parties. The party elites tend to play a main character in party changes and new political approaches within Leftist parties.

In Venezuela MAS was among the first parties to promote the regional leadership in the early 1970’s. Although, political scientist Diego Bautista Urbaneja is quite critical and suggests that MAS saw political opportunities in decentralization as an emergency exit to escape from its national crisis as a political party. Some parties succeeded in more smoothly redesigning their internal structure, whereas others (as MAS) entered the decentralized political system with a more brutal approach. The initially much more regional Causa R, in its political program before the elections of 1993, presented decentralization as a necessary feature of democracy as a system:

Democracy implies decentralization. This means bringing power of decision from sovereignty and autocracy to the people, so that the people through participation become decisive of the programs, its leaders and operations.

The Tocquevillian ideas of democracy and a decentralized type of State were thus present in the propositions of Causa R, and were obviously received by the citizens as something appealing as the election results showed. Castañeda argues that reforms like modifications of the electoral

510 See for example, Roberts, 1998a: 41-42.
512 La Causa R, 1993. Although, it is relevant to mention that Alfredo Maneiro, initial chief ideologist and founder of La Causa R, was to consider centralist as for political party structure.
laws and decentralization have both advantages and disadvantages, although they normally urge Leftist parties to spearhead them. With the banner of municipalize democracy and democratize the municipality, Causa R struggled to crate new kinds of popular participation and a more vivid interaction with the citizens. Once in regional state government position, however, due to the lack of any tradition of influential social role of the civil organizations, Causa R realized that “it is easier to govern the people than govern with the people.”

Now, in the context of the weakening of the CTV unionism (once so strong and important for AD) and the advances of Causa R on the organized labor scene. Hellinger argues that decreasing oil incomes and the indebtment of the 1980’s weakened the partyarchic system based on clientelism and corporatism. But, he adds, the crisis cannot alone explain this evolution. I argue that decentralization was decisive in this context, with new political foras for opposition movements. PPT leader and founding member of Causa R, Pablo Medina, holds that the CTV crisis, and especially the BTV scandals*, came like gifts from above for the Causa R movement. It helped to illustrate the democratic problem within the Venezuelan trade union movement, that according to Medina had its roots in the too forceful and aggressive attitude of AD unionists, acting like firemen when in government, and as general strikers in opposition. It is very likely that scandals like this have helped Causa R and weakened both AD and CTV, as for credibility and popularity. Generally, the difficulty to separate trade union leaders from political leaders and trade unions from government has contributed to the credibility crisis. At the same time, the obvious disappointment of the people towards the political parties has also led to

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516 Sesto, 1992 a: 114-115. Pablo Medina left the Causa R in 1997 to form a new party: Patria Para Todos (Fatherland For All).
* The Venezuelan Workers Bank –BTV- (Banco de los Trabajadores de Venezuela) was opened in 1968 and since then it was controlled by the AD fraction of the CTV. During the 1970’s the BTV expanded rapidly and CTV got with of its economic dependence towards the State through this expansion. By 1980 the BTV was the nation’s largest private financial institution and probably the largest financial empire of any labor union movement of the world. The BTV was intervened by the State in 1982 and a series of mismanagement scandals and irregularities within the Bank became clear, which eventually led to prison sentences for the BTV President and an ex-President of the CTV. See, Ellner, 1993: 181-187; Hellinger, 1996; López Maya, 1989: 140-144.
that the citizens look for political alternatives, e.g. at the municipal and regional level, which in all might contribute to the comprehension of the relative success of Causa R and MAS.

**Decentralization: A Complex and Contradictory Challenge**

Official decentralization has not naturally led to an automatic transfer of economic, social and political functions of the state to the regional level. After having heard the opinion of the regional legislative assembly, the governor has to apply for each transfer of public service, e.g., health, education etc., from the national level. In this bureaucratic process the Venezuelan governors have met political resistance and it has not shown so easy to effectuate the decentralized services. As Ellner stresses, decentralization of services is left to the initiative of the governors of the respective states. But, he adds, the governors have evolved into more important figures, since they have increased their responsibilities and decision-making capacity.

Indeed, there is money involved and available for the political parties at decentralized levels, legally granted to parties, and the respective governors and mayors as they get elected. These economic resources can be used to satisfy a political clientele. The Constitution and the laws that regulate elections, political participation and decentralization (e.g. the situado) establish the State economic contribution for campaigning, services etc. based on previous electoral results. Considering the fiscal decentralization, the Constitution permits the establishment of federal state taxation of production and consumption, if it is not regulated through a national government law. In practice, though, regional governments have limited possibilities to develop their own tributary competencies. At the municipal level, however, there exist wider possibilities for taxation by the mayors. Rafael de la Cruz of the COPRE executive board expects the functioning of the decentralized governments on municipal and state level to improve further, due to the closeness to the citizens. He adds that in many states the governors have reached agreements (convenios) with the municipalities to co-administer the public system of, e.g., education, health, sports and

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517 The regional legislative assemblies are elected popularly to execute legislation concerning their proper respective regional states.


519 Ibid.: 21.

520 de la Cruz, 1995: 24f.
culture. Nevertheless, even if governors and mayors early were given authority to influence budget allocations, the dependence on the center remained as previously indicated.

Venezuelan political scientists Milagros Matheus and Elena Romero have studied a few aspects of decentralization, with a focus on the municipal level in the Zulia state. They conclude that one of the major implications of these processes is the excessive creation of new local entities for local government. The problem is, though, that these political and institutional changes have not been accompanied by a changing of the economic system. There is an elite on the national level that is resisting all possible economic transformation that could imply that its decision-making position on a national level should be threatened. López Maya too mentions the existence of this resistance, leading to increased socio-political tensions between regional and national political actors, as well as between the state and society as a whole. In fact, COPRE suggested mechanisms for a redistribution of available resources, and did not recommend an increased economic role for the regional state administration. Thus decentralization has signified evident successes, but it also created problems. These tendencies and factors are complex and contradictory and need to be sorted out. In broad terms, the Venezuelan decentralization has represented:

A) A deepening of democracy.
B) Decentralization as a smokescreen for neo-liberalism and privatization.
C) Excesses and abuses.

As mentioned, the new structure and political-territorial division of the government also brought forward the need of restructuring within the political parties. Likewise, new parties got easier access to the State and political leadership in the municipalities and regional states, in all contributing to a transformation of the party system. The first argument and significance of decentralization has already been discussed in the introductory and theoretical chapters, as well as in the sections on the

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521 Ibid.: 19f.
523 López Maya, 1997: 120.
524 Ellner, 2002 (e-mail comments on previous draft of this PhD. thesis work).
COPRE reforms. As for the second, decentralization was an elegant way for the central government to wash its hands of responsibilities that it had in the framework of the old concept of "sowing the oil" which implied an interventionist and centralized State.

Regarding the excesses and abuses as consequences of decentralization, here references can be made of the duplication of bureaucracy. Besides, clientelism at the local level is more apt to produce corruption and inefficiency than clientelism at the national level. Decentralization thus produced excesses. It produced a duplication of bureaucracy and also facilitated privatization (as in the case of the port system and with the salt industry where decentralization was followed by privatization, since the state or municipal government certainly does not have the resources to run these industries).525 As an illustrating example of this situation of continued centralized control of the economic resources, one City Councilor of Maracaibo described this resistance by the central government:

Here in Zulia, the laws that transferred ports, airports, salt mines, and bridges - including the bridge over the Lake [of Maracaibo] - to the state were promulgated. But the great central power has basically blocked decentralization ... In many cases they give you the responsibilities but not the resources. For instance, the bridge over the Lake [of Maracaibo] was just delivered [to the state] but the central government kept more than two hundred million bolívares [of assets]... The sum total of the cables and the repair of some pillars cost the same as it did to build the bridge. ENSAL, which is a public [salt] company has abandoned Moján [a salt marsh]. They handed over the junk equipment by way of decentralization, but there are no resources at this moment to put the plant there in operation.526

As argued in the second theoretical chapter, a further risk with decentralization is that an inefficient State bureaucracy just is moved downwards, i.e., from the capital to the distinct regions. Another problem is that the states still depend on the center for economic financing. Decentralization is often a complicated process where the actors have to struggle for the transformation of state authority. To launch an example, in Aragua, governor Tablante had to wait three years (from 1990 to 1993) for the approbation of an application for the transfer of the Institute for the Care

525 Ellner, 2002.
of Children. In all, the approved applications from governors correspond to a minor part of the total. Until March of 1995, 17 of the 85 requests were approved in Venezuela and of these three in Aragua and one in Bolivar.  

The fiscal decentralization has not yet been (wholly) introduced in Venezuela. Fiscal decentralization implies a delicate task for the national government, since it here is question of the disposition of resources from state funds for the governors and the majors. Both the political and the financial dependence still remains and the states exercise only limited powers. Furthermore, restrictions on the states’ revenue raising abilities increase this dependence even more and make the states subjects to national government’s priorities. Ex-President Caldera asserts that decentralization offers new ways to more directly meet the necessities of the people. But at the same time he emphasizes that the regional attorneys are agents of the national power, ”and if they lose this idea they are without doubt failing to comply one of the fundamental obligations.” Moreover, the President adds that it would be a mistake to transfer the faults of the central administration to the 22 states.

Another problem with decentralization is the unequal quality of social services for the citizens of the distinct states. A common opinion is that the states that are better off economically, due to their industrialization and enterprise, as for example Aragua, have decentralized more, thanks to the available economic resources. Here too, however, it is a question of the personal ability of the governor to negotiate with the center and to carry out policies. Ironically, when speaking of the deteriorating socio-economic conditions of the Venezuelans, Caracas and its surroundings can be considered as the first victim of the traditional centralism and the so far inefficient decentralization, states Henrique Fernando Salas Feo, governor of the state of Carabobo. For example, if you ask the population of the Caracas region or the surrounding state of Miranda, if their public services are working, if they have water etc., the answers would be generally

527 de la Cruz, 1995: 14-18.
528 Hillman,1994: 58.
529 Peña, 1997: http://www.el-nacional.com/archivo/1997/03/01/política/politica6.htm (The article was written before the official declaration of Venezuela’s 23rd state: Vargas.
negative.\textsuperscript{531} Here we see a distinction if we depart in Putnam’s study on the Italian decentralization, in which regions with higher level of civic culture constituted the decisive factor for the outcome of decentralization. In Venezuela the economic initial situation is most often mentioned as the decisive circumstance for successful regional government. The possible connection between the economic conditions and levels of civic culture will notwithstanding not further be sorted out in the course of this study, but logically regional states and municipalities with greater economic resources should be capable of establishing functional institutions and services.

### The Elections of 1995

In December of 1995, elections were held for 22 state governorships, 370 regional deputies, 330 mayors and 3,082 members of neighborhood councils.\textsuperscript{532}

#### Elections of Governors and Mayors 1995 \textsuperscript{533}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>AD</th>
<th>COPEI</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>LCR</th>
<th>Conv.</th>
<th>Pr.Carab.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governors</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayors</td>
<td>184</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

First of all, AD recovered political representation at the regional level, whereas COPEI lost in comparison with the 1992 elections. MAS remains a regional political force, as well as Causa R, but on the municipal level the AD-COPEI domination is still overwhelming. Regarding the development of MAS, the elected governor of Aragua, Didalco Bolívar, replaced Tablante in 1996 and thus maintains the superior position of MAS in the state. Even on the lower spatial levels the MAS party has seen some triumphs in Aragua. In the 1992 elections, MAS won in eight mayordomes, while COPEI took home five and AD only two. In 1995 MAS reinforced its superior position in the state, obtaining nine mayordomes, compared to five for COPEI and two for AD.\textsuperscript{534}

\textsuperscript{531} Salas Feo, speech, Caracas, 31 July, 1997.
\textsuperscript{532} ODCA, 1996: 109.
\textsuperscript{533} Author’s estimation & ODCA, 1996: 110-118.
In these elections, Causa R indeed lost some prestigious political territories and, as mentioned, managed to win only in the Zulia state. Causa R likewise fell short in Caracas, where adeco reformist Antonio Ledezma triumphed in the Libertador Municipality. The results from these regional and municipal elections are generally considered as a hard blow for the party. Taking these aspects in consideration, López Maya suggests that Causa R seemed to accept its role as a regional and local political force. However, even if the party lost some districts, we cannot naturally say that they have decreased as a party or political force, the loss could be said to be relative. Generally, Causa R has grown as a party nationwide, from having had a basic support limited to a few regions, to a political organization that in almost all Venezuelan states has grown, if we compare the regional election results of 1992 and 1995. For example, in the industrial state of Anzoátegui, the Causa R support increased from 6,39% to 28,23%. In Bolívar, however, known as the traditional base of Causa, they lost some support and went down from 63,36% in 1992, to 46,76% in 1995. Still, at the same time the party grew in various states from less than 1% to over 20% the votes. The party concentrated on maintaining the municipality and governorship seats it had since 1992, thus failing in taking advantage of the national impact through the 1993 presidential elections. At the same time, the party concentrated all its efforts on the presidential campaign of Velásquez in 1993 and was criticized for not allowing the appearance of other local and regional leaders.

The tradition of alliances continued in the elections of 1995. The party of President Caldera, Convergencia, formed the Solidarity Alliance (Alianza Solidaria) with MAS, that is, the same coalition that formed the national government of Caldera. This alliance raced in 16 of the 22 states and triumphed in two states (in Lara with a candidate of MAS and in Yaracuy with a Convergencia candidate). More surprisingly, this Solidarity Alliance expanded in three states, incorporating also COPEI, that is one of the parties that more harshly criticized the Caldera government. Even so, in all three states, the Convergencia-MAS-COPEI alliance triumphed, with a COPEI candidate in Nueva Esparta and candidates of MAS in Portuguesa and Sucre. An even more “unholy” alliance was formed between MAS and

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537 López Maya, 1996: 5f.
538 Ellner, 1993 b.
COPEI in four states, and in the relative stronghold of MAS in Aragua, the alliance won with Didalco Bolivar.\textsuperscript{539}

In the Bolívar state, AD and Convergencia formed a coalition that with a small marginal was proclaimed winner against Causa R. The Causa R candidate, Victor Moreno (like Velásquez former SUTISS president), obtained more votes than any of the other candidates, but the AD-Convergencia alliance out-maneuvered the radicals.\textsuperscript{540} After the AD victory in Bolívar in 1995, Velásquez and other Causa R leaders denounced the election results as fraudulent and demanded the repetition of the procedure.\textsuperscript{541} Like in the national presidential elections of 1993, Causa R claimed that the victory should have been theirs. Andrés Velásquez recalls the loss of the governorship in Bolivar as the end of a cycle, referring to the control over civil society by the political parties, and likewise he recognizes a strategic error by his own party.

In the Venezuelan case [the political parties] have perverted at absolutely all instances of citizen life. And there departs the general rejection. Causa R cared a lot not to behave like that, converting into an expression of the people, tied to its own interests and conflicts. With a leadership that did not decrees itself, but recognizing its role as mandate of the people. Notwithstanding, expressions have emerged that fail to suit our criteria. In the case of Bolivar, in 1995 Causa R made a typical party decision. Our compañero Victor Moreno was not the natural candidate. The candidate would have been Clemente Scotto or Eliécer Calzadilla. But, to save the internal situation we looked for a third, under the criterion that we would win with any candidate.\textsuperscript{542}

The quotation above indicates that the Causa R leadership felt so self-secure on its support after the 1993 presidential elections. Overall, the radical party seemed to be the only party that dared to enter the elections without allies, with two exceptions. In Zulia the party won with the multi-alliance behind Fransisco Arias Cárdenas, and in Carabobo where the alliance failed to reach enough electoral support. A more traditional alliance was formed between AD and COPEI in two states, and it won in the Delta Amacuro state with an adeco candidate. Thais Maingón and Heinz Sonntag draw an

\textsuperscript{539} Authors’ observations & Maingón & Sonntag, 1996: 8.

\textsuperscript{540} ODCA, 1996: 110-116.

\textsuperscript{541} El Nacional, 05/01/96: D1.

\textsuperscript{542} Velásquez, interviewed in El Universal, 23 February, 1997.
important conclusion with respect to these varying political-electoral alliances. Since the alliances varied so much in the distinct states, the electorate perceived the parties as extremely pragmatic machines, with the only pursuit of winning or staying in power at any cost. At the mayorality level the distribution per party can be viewed in percentages of the whole nation, although the alliance formations difficult for the analyst and therefore the numbers of mayordomes and percentages are not exact.

**Election of Mayors in 1995**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>194</td>
<td>58,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPEI</td>
<td>93</td>
<td>28,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2,7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causa R</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2,1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proyecto Carabobo</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergencia/MAS</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPEI/MAS</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1,8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0,9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>328</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The figures reveal a maintained AD-COPEI domination of the political system at the municipal level. If we add the alliances of MAS with Convergencia and COPEI, the traditionalism (thus placing Convergencia among the traditionalists) held 92,5 % nation-wide in these elections. But, important, the figures do not reveal which mayoralties each party won, and the differences between rich and poor municipalities are huge. At the regional state level, legislative assembly deputies were elected. To more clearly analyze the regional state power in each state, a division covering each regional state is necessary. The distribution of seats per party in the respective states indicates a high level of regionalism i.e. both traditional and new parties have certain strongholds, as seen in the table below:

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The figures here differ partly from the previous table due to variations in the calculation of alliances. As seen, a few of the alliances are included in the table.

Mascareño, 2000: 49.
Deputies to regional state legislative assemblies 1995

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Regional state</th>
<th>Total of seats</th>
<th>AD</th>
<th>COPEI</th>
<th>Causa R</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>Convergencia</th>
<th>AS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Amazonas</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anzoátegui</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apure</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aragua</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Barinas</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolívar</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carabobo</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cojedes</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Delta Amacuro</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Falcón</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Guárico</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lara</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mérida</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monagas</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nueva Esparta</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portuguesa</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sucre</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Táchira</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trujillo</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yaracuy</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zulia</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Not surprisingly, Causa R presents a strong even majoritarian legislative force in Bolívar with AD as the only other political power. In Monagas, the probably firmest of all traditional AD strongholds, the party stands out in own majority. As a politically and economically strategical state, Aragua shows a more divided scenario with representation from all five parties, but

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546 Buxton, 2001: 125 (does not include seats won by independents).
* AS is the Solidarity Alliance (Alianza Solidaria) of Convergencia and MAS.
with COPEI and MAS scoring highest with 7 and 6 seats respectively, both thus depending on alliances for legislation. A similar pattern is descernable in the oil-state of Zulia, but with Causa R as one of the strongest actors and AD as the only force with slightly higher representation. Confirming the hypothesis of MAS as a regional force, the Sucre state constitutes an example where MAS holds the governorship and with a relatively high legislative representation. In Lara too this tendency is palpable, where the party formed an alliance with Convergencia, the two together almost reaching majority. The regional character of Convergencia in Yaracuy is likewise confirmed in the table. An almost general trend of prioritation in electoral efforts can likewise be imagined. Notwithstanding, not all of the important Venezuelan political actors participated in elections in 1995, as will be described below.

The Hugo Chávez movement: MBR-200

“Hugo Chávez es mi nombre
Comandante de los "alzaos"
“alzaos” pa’ los del gobierno
Patriota pa´mi pueblo hambreao
Yo naci en los mismos llanos
De este pueblo pisoteao
Soy un turpial po´el pico
Y un tigre por lo pintao
Con una lanza en la mano
Y un garrote encabulleao…”547

“Hugo Chávez is my name
Comandante of the rebels
“rebels” against those of the government
Patriotic for my hungry people
I was born in the plain lowlands
Of this humiliated people
I’m a turpial * that sings constantly
And I look like a tigre.
With a sword in my hand,
and a hand-made wip.548

547 Barrios-Ferrer, 1996: 33. This chavista version of a classic anthem is written in a Spanish as spoken by people in the marginalized sectors, e.g. with swallowed syllables and consonants. Chávez is far from the first to use a popular language in the political discourse. For example Teodoro Petkoff had been known for using “street language” politically, not seldom including baseball terms (like Chávez). The poem is supposed to illustrate the mythical cult that emerged around Hugo Chávez as a person. Another example is a Chávez version of “Our Father”, written when he was imprisoned: (Chávez nuestro que está en la cárcel…etc. (Our Chávez that is in jail…etc.))

* The turpial is a yellow bird, typical for the Venezuelan lowlands, which has a symbolic value related to combat and capacity as a warrior.

548 My traduction.
The Revolutionary Bolivarian Movement-200, MBR-200 (Movimiento Bolivariano Revolucionario –200) was formed in 1983 and the name alludes to the 200th anniversary of the birth of Liberator Simón Bolívar. The political approach of MBR-200 can be described as nationalist and populist in its anti-establishment strategies. Officially the program of the movement is based on "Bolivarianism" (the ideas of Bolívar), a general struggle against corruption and the urgent need to install a moral public power (beside the traditional executive, legislative and judicial powers) and a major popular participation. The MBR movement was strengthened in 1989 as it took advantage of the critical situation related to the Caracazo disturbances, criticizing "the corrupt elites" to use the Armed Forces to massacre the people. The democratic model suggested by the MBR-200 stems from the thoughts on democracy of Simón Bolívar, that is: “a government system that should produce the greatest possible sum of happiness, the highest sum of social security and the biggest sum of political stability.” The utilitarian ideas of Jeremy Bentham and John Stuart Mill are quite evident in this Bolivarian model of democracy, and Bolívar indeed read the works of Bentham during the late 18th Century.

It is now important to underline the huge importance of Causa R for the political project of the movement around Chávez. After the 1993 election (and particularly after the Causa R split in 1997), the electorate gave high attention to Chávez, who launched the same messages as Causa R. In this context, Chávez recalls his first contacts with the leaders of Causa R, introduced to them through his older brother Adán. With admiration he describes his impressions of Alfredo Maneiro, initial chief ideologist of Causa R.

549 The usage of Bolívar in the discourses of the modern Venezuelan parties is far from new. Rómulo Betancourt agreed with Bolívar on the necessity to maintain political and administrative centralization, and Causa R has also repeatedly included the Liberator in several party documents and discourses. (See for example, Myers, 2003; Buxton, 2001). Also in other Latin American countries, the Bolivarian spirit is manifest, among others those related to continental integration (See, Pakkasvirta, 2002).

550 See for example, Gómez Calcaño & Patruyo, 1999; Díaz Rangel, 2002.

551 López Maya, 1996: 16.


** Adán Chávez made academic career at the Universidad de los Andes in Mérida, and later he would hold important government positions from 1999 onwards.
I spoke with Maneiro in an apartment where I lived there in Maracay [regional capital of Aragua], I was 25 years old, it was in 1978, and it was the only occasion I saw him in my life. I remember Maneiro clearly when he told me: “Chávez, we have now found the forth table leg.” He spoke about the working class –the leg in Guayana-, the popular sectors, the intellectuals and the middle class, and the armed forces. (…) I went to Catia to see what the Causa R boys were doing, how they spread propaganda. I even went to paste posters in the street with one of their groups. (…) My meeting with Maneiro, why not tell it straight out, I was secure that things would not go via Douglas Bravo [*], therefore I approached Causa R, most of all for their work with the popular movement, which was vital for the civic-military vision of struggle that started to take form in me. Then I had a very clear idea of the work with the masses, and this was missing in Douglas’ group; but in Causa R I felt a smell of the masses.553

Likewise, Chávez confesses that if Maneiro had not died so suddenly, things would have developed most differently and he does not exclude the possibility that he would have made a political career with Causa R. He also continued for years to meet for discussions with both Andrés Velásquez, Pablo Medina and other movement leaders. Although, when Velásquez had triumphed in Bolívar, Chávez failed to establish further contacts. Chávez sent messages to Velásquez through Medina and other messengers, but despite even using a wig to approach the governance building, further direct meetings between the two failed.554 It is also of relevance to emphasize that Douglas Bravo and his party Partido de la Revolución Venezolana –PRV- (Venezuelan Revolution Party) would continue to influence the movement of Chávez.555

As described in the section on Causa R, the leadership division of the party had already taken roots, since both Medina and Velásquez aspired to be the chief follower of the principles of Maneiro. In personal conversations with Tello Benítez I was informed that also within the Velásquez-wing of the

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* Douglas Bravo is like Maneiro (and MAS leader Teodoro Petkoff) a legendary former guerrilla leader and is mentioned as possibly the recruiter of Chávez to the leftist movements. Bravo is today leading the Tercer Camino (Third Way) party [nothing to do with Tony Blair or Anthony Giddens, though, as Bravo himself assures]. The division between Bravo and Chávez initiated already during their first meetings in the late 1970’s.

553 Chávez interviewed in Harnecker, 2002: 8.

554 ibid.: 10.

555 López Maya, 2003 b: 75.
party, a quantity of militants could reconsider supporting a more or less violent project of transformation.\(^{556}\) I would here emphasize that under other circumstances the Causa R and the Chávez movement could have developed together and unified. Then the hypothesis of going from the political micro level to the macro, and decentralization as crucial for changes in the party system (and how a local/regional political movement reaches national power) would result almost in a schoolbook example. Particularly so if considerations of possible fraud in the presidential elections of 1993 were included. In due course I will argue further that Causa R and Chávez surfed on the same wave of political discontentment among the Venezuelans. Resumed the above, it should be set clear that while imprisoned Chávez received offers from a varying scope of politicians, particularly during the 1993 presidential campaign, but Chávez negated to participate with any movement associated with the Punto Fijo regime. As he repeatedly stated, a real system change could only be achieved from outside the established party system.\(^{557}\)

Before the regional and municipal elections of 1995 the MBR-200 movement, led by Hugo Chávez, recently released from prison, initiated a political tour through the Venezuelan states with the exhortation of active electoral abstention. A direct popular message to boycott the decentralized elections was launched: "Por ahora por ninguno" (At the moment For Nobody).\(^{558}\) Chávez explains that the objective of the MBR-200 electoral abstention campaign was in order to develop the political movement and to raise the motivation among the citizens. It served as a protest against the Venezuelan tradition of partisan politics and indeed the abstention rose to its [second (sic.)] highest level ever in the democratic history of Venezuela.\(^{559}\) At the same time, though, Comandante Fransisco Arias Cárdenas, brother in arms of Chávez during the first coup attempt in

\(^{556}\) Benítez, interview, Puerto Ordáz, 29\(^{th}\) of June, 1997.


\(^{558}\) The "Por ahora"-expression became a symbolic trademark for Hugo Chávez and the political movements around him, since he was arrested after the coup attempt on the 4th of February 1992 and managed to speak to the nation in Venezuelan television (he only confessed that "for the moment" the coup had failed).

\(^{559}\) Blanco Muñóz, 1998: 301-306. See also, Canache, 2000, for an analysis of the growth in popularity of the movement of Chávez. According to research by González de Pacheco, the abstention level was slightly higher in the 1989 elections (54 % compared to 53,89 in 1995), although Chávez expressed that 1995 presented the highest level. (González de Pacheco, 2000: 5).
February 1992, was given amnesty (as Chávez) from prison in 1994. Arias was not only pardoned by Caldera but also appointed president of the Program for Mother and Infant Nutrition (PAMI). The subsequent year he decided to enter the democratic game via the new decentralized rules, and was elected governor for the important “oil-state” of Zulia, the state where he in 1992 had held the then governor Oswaldo Alvarez Paz hostage in his own home.

Arias won the governorship of Zulia, representing an alliance consisting of both Causa R and COPEI. When Arias candidated for the governorship he was criticized by the Chávez wing of MBR-200 for participation within a corrupt State. In the same context of the regional elections of 1995, Chávez recognizes that propositions on his candidature for a governorship were launched in MBR-200, e.g. in the states of Aragua, Lara and Barinas. But, this project was cancelled due to a decision of the constitutional front of the movement to call for the electoral abstention. However, it is important to underline that the political (and ideological) rivalry between Arias and Chávez started much earlier, during the prison term after the coup attempt in 1992. Initially the movement around Chávez was intimately connected with Causa R, particularly the group around Pablo Medina (many of whom later would assume important posts in the government of Chávez).

For George Philip, the political opening that Chávez took advantage of was the result of the deepening crisis of the traditional parties and particularly the increased lack of public respect towards these parties and the political system that surrounded them. Swedish political scientist Fredrik Uggla agrees on the double dimension and contradictory implications of the Venezuelan partyarchy (as presented by Coppedge). In the first place it gave the Venezuelan political system an exceptional political stability for decades [especially in a comparison with other Latin American nations during the period], among others, through the extreme extension of co-optation of civil society groups and control of the media. On the other hand, though, other less formal instruments for the checks-and-balances functions of a democratic system were excluded and thus deprived of their role as “watchdogs”, also in order to make the government responsive. For Uggla these contradictory results of partyarchy contributed to a deepening

562 Philip, 2000: 1-2
suspicion and political discontent among the citizens towards their political leaders, which also contributes to a better understanding of how a populist leader as Hugo Chávez could emerge in Venezuela.563

**Decreasing Electoral Participation**

For the Venezuelan people, one immediate result of decentralization is that there are now more elections than ever. It is worth mentioning that voting in Venezuela is obligatory, although electoral abstention has increased during the period of the study. At the same time, citizens that do not care about voting do not receive any legal punishment, and besides, the national citizen registration does not function well. In the national elections between 1968 and 1983 the abstention rate ranged between 10 and 12 %.564 But, in the municipal elections of 1984 it reached 40,7 %. In the following presidential elections of 1988, abstention was 18,3 %, but in the state and municipal elections of 1989 the abstention rate went up to 54,8 %, and was maintained at that level at the local and regional elections of 1992. For Levine & Crisp, this evolution is best understood as the growing popular repudiation of the political parties and the negative attitudes towards the Venezuelan democracy and its institutions.565

It is important to emphasize the fact that the political decentralization was introduced just when the social and political discontent was at a high, i.e., a few months after the riots in February of 1989, and after a decade of socio-economic recession. Coppedge holds that the lack of credibility towards the national political leaders was decisive for the abstention in the first decentralized elections. Elections were held in the backwater of extraordinary corruption scandals during the Lusinchi presidency between 1984 and 1988, which contributed to the lack of enthusiasm among the citizens.566 Likewise, in the concluding remarks of Strong Parties and Lame Ducks, Coppedge asserts that the high abstention in the 1989 elections proved that citizens had not yet realized how much political power they really disposed. At the same time, considering the regional elections of 1992 (when many AD governors were defeated) and the regional and grassroots background of the presidential elections of 1993

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showed that Venezuelans had started to use the possibilities presented through decentralization to change the political party system.567

With a longer-term perspective, the abstention level of the local elections of 1995 was 55 %, compared to only 17 % in 1979.568 It might be seen as surprising that the abstention has been higher in the state and municipal elections than in the national ones, since the citizens should be more likely to participate on the political levels closer to their everyday life. But, at the same time, the national election is a bigger act in which the traditional political parties invest huge amounts of money in campaign work. Moreover, since the decentralization program not yet has been totally implemented and with the remaining difficulties for state and municipal actors to transfer authorities from the national level we might partly understand the relative political passivity of the citizens who often not have seen any concrete positive changes with decentralization. As Kornblith and Levine conclude, the general lack of electoral response to the new opportunities that decentralized direct elections imply, also suggests a broader communication gap between the political parties and the Venezuelan voters.569

The “tradition” of electoral fraud in Venezuela had been linked to AD and COPEI, both reported to having stolen votes (by altering the countings - actas- at local polling places). Entire "not desired" actas were nullified for "irregularity reasons". In these elections ballot boxes in areas of Causa R popularity were reported found in garbage cans after the elections. Moreover, Hellinger quotes a recent Julia Buxton study: "This disenfranchisement is not due to any failings on the part of the electorate, it is due to the politicization of table members which prevent the basic tasks of counting votes from being carried out in a fair and neutral manner".570 The Venezuelan citizens have not been unaware of these fraudulent actions behind the electoral processes, which most probably have influenced on the increasing passivity in elections.

Political Tensions and Conflicts at the Regional and Local Levels

A general trait of the behavior of the political parties since decentralization was introduced has been the difficulty to cooperate between the political-territorial levels, conflictive and auto-defensive strategies, and the tradition of accusing politicians of other parties at other levels of mismanagement of funds, corruption and general inefficiency or laziness. Already in the first period of decentralization AD Mayor Claudio Fermín in Caracas was confronted with accusations of mismanagement of funds during his government, which also led to a short stay in a Caracas prison. A typical way to try to get rid of inconvenient mayors or governors has been to confront them with the responsibility to present their revision of “Memories and accounts” (M&A), and if they fail to do so they might have to leave office.

Chronological list of Repeals of Governmental mandates and Rejections of Memories and Accounts (June 1992-February 1995)  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Event Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>June 92:</td>
<td>Referendum is held in the Municipality of Pampatar (Nueva Esparta state) and in Cajigal(Anzoátegui) to decide upon the continuation of the respective mayors.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sept. 92:</td>
<td>The Mayor of the Vargas Municipality is suspended (this case would be the legal precedent of later destitutions of mayors and governors).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 93:</td>
<td>Referendum is held in the Municipality Jiménez (Lara state) due to the rejection of the Memories and accounts (onwards M&amp;A) of the mayor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feb. 94:</td>
<td>Referendum in the Autónomo Rojas Municipality due to the rejection of M&amp;A of the mayor.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 94:</td>
<td>Ratification of the rejection of M&amp;A of the mayor of Rojas (Barinas).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 94:</td>
<td>Rejection of M&amp;A, and later destitution of the Governor of the Anzoátegui state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mar. 94:</td>
<td>The Legislative Assembly of the Amazonas state disapproves the M&amp;A of the governor, who consequently is suspended. New elections are set for April 24th and the rejected governor then applies for the</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

cancellation of the destitution act. The Supreme Electoral Council (CSE) is entitled to decide in the case.

Mar. 94: After a violent afternoon session, the Legislative Assembly of the Anzoátegui state rejects the M&A of the governor. New elections are set for April 24th.


April 94: Referendum in the Arismendi Municipality (Nueva Esparta) on the destiny of the mayor

May 94: The Supreme Council of Justice (CSJ) confirms the decision of new elections of governor in the Anzoátegui state. The CSJ decides to postpone the elections to June 26th and does not allow the suspended governor to candidate.

May 94: The Legislative Assembly of the Carabobo state rejects the M&A of the governor, but without his destitution since qualifying majority not was reached.

July 94: The Legislative Assembly of the Aragua state rejects the M&A of the governor, but not with enough support to destitute him.

July 94: The mayor of the Vargas Municipality (Federal District) is destituted.

Sept. 94: Rejection of the M&A of the governor of Guárico.

Sept. 94: Destitution of the mayor of Higuerote (Miranda state).

Sept. 94: Possibility of rejection of M&A of the governor of Lara.

Oct. 94: The CSJ confirms the rejection of the M&A of the mayor of Vargas, who is destituted.

Oct. 94: Disapproval of the M&A of the governor of Barinas, who applied for the cancellation of the decision due to suspected irregularity of the process.

Oct. 94: The Legislative Assembly of the Lara state votes for a rejection of the M&A of the governor.

Nov. 94: Referendum on the political destiny of the Vargas mayor (between 70 and 90 % of abstention).

Jan. 95: The mayor of San Casimiro is destituted for supposed administrative irregularities.

Feb. 95: The governor of Amazonas is destituted for rejection of the M&A. The president of the Legislative Assembly calls for assistance of the National Guard and the Police of Intelligence to be able to fulfill the decision of a nomination of a provisional governor.

One illustrative example of the magnitude of corruption in Venezuelan politics is without doubt the pure existence of a three volumes dictionary of corruption in Venezuela. Practically all cases include participation of
politicians (or other State institutional leaders or administrators). Both before and after 1989, responsible governors have been denounced for irregularities and mismanagement. Very seldom, though, the accused governors or other political leaders have ended up in prison, except for a number of shorter detentions. The first popularly elected mayor of the Mérida state, Fortunato González Cruz recalls how his neighbors asked his wife why they had not bought a new exclusive car.

Is not your husband the mayor, with access to all that money? Why should you go around with this rubbish of a car?

Former mayor of Vargas, Ubaldo Martínez, experienced similar situations. When I ask him what was the most difficult once he had been elected, he responds immediately:

The corruption, there is no doubt about it. It took some time before I learned even how to make the secretaries only pull out a drawer to get a specific paper; some money extra, free time, gifts etc. That was the most frustrating thing with being the mayor.

Sociologists Cathy Rakowski and María Nuria de Cesaris have analyzed the political struggle at the municipal level in rural areas, and particularly in the states of Monagas and Anazoátegui. They conclude that decentralization seemed to function better when the governor, the mayor and the junta members were from the same party:

As members of the same party, the leaders were familiar with each other and interacted easily. With the 1992 elections, this chain is broken. The governor and Junta members of AD and the mayor a member of Convergencia and professed enemy of AD. The situation can be summarized as follows: the Junta refuses to cooperate with the mayor who refuses to meet with the Junta or to provide them with the operating expenses they are due by law. The Junta persistently goes over the mayor to the governor who tries smooth things over. The mayor publicly accuses the governor of corruption and then accuses everyone who has collaborated with the governor of corruption - including the forestry company, the local oil company, and other employers. The mayor also accuses

572 Capriles, 1992 (Vol. 1-3).
573 González Cruz, Interview, Mérida, 11 June 1999.
574 Martínez, Interview, Catia La Mar, 5 June, 2000.
the governor of creating hardship for the municipality by withholding budget funds mandated by law. The governor denies this. The mayor attempts to collect taxes from local employers through strongarm tactics and employers seek the Junta and governor’s assistance. The Junta collects ”donations” from employers to use for operating expenses (... perceived by employers as a type of tax). The mayor never sets foot in Araguaney [fictive name of the city of Chaguaramos] until election year and, when he does, he mobilizes different interest groups and leads two protests, blocking the regional highway and burning tires. The mayor’s office constructs no public works projects in the town until approximately six months prior to the election (in contrast to the prior mayor and the governor who funded projects consistently over their terms). 575

To conclude that they seem to fight and make a lot of noise in Venezuelan politics is evidently a clear understatement, leading the thoughts to the words of Prussian military theorist, Carl von Clausewitz, who argued that politics was just a continuation of war, with other means [weapons], and vice-versa. 576 Returning to the context of Monagas and Anzoátegui, Maria Matheus presents a comparative evaluation of how decentralization has developed in distinct Venezuelan states. She concludes that generally the states of Anzoátegui and Monagas have showed a lack of genuine political will towards decentralization and its possibilities, particularly in a comparison with the states of Aragua and Carabobo, where new institutions were better organized, and with ambitions to find solutions to problems that arise. 577

Somewhat ironically, on September 15th 2004, ex-President Rafael Caldera looked back at this period of Venezuelan politics:

The most important thing of the Venezuelan democracy has been the direct election of governors and municipal mayors. The step was taken and the result satisfying. Elected governors of distinct currents emerged. People thought that they would face inconveniences with the national government but actually they did not. They maintained normal relationships, even excellent, with the governors of distinct currents, some of

575 Rakowski & de Cesaris, 1996: 17-18
576 An extreme example can be mentioned. In the state of Vargas during the mega-electoral campaign in 2000 a personal conflict between two of the candidates for mayor for MVR, civil chief Jesús Vallejo and municipality prefect Gerson Omar Zambrano, ended up in violence and tragedy. The civil chief shot the prefect to death in his office. But, such a situation is extremely far from the normal “more peaceful” procedure.
these in open opposition. There were governors like Andrés Velásquez, who had just competed with me in the presidencial rally in which he achieved an important portion of the votes. The relations between the President and governor Velásquez did not present any kind of inconvenience. (...) A particularly interesting case was governor Arias Cárdenas, since he was one of the leaders behind the 4th of February of 1992, and therefore they thought that he would have bad relationships with the national government. That was not the case. The problems were resolved and the work of the governor was actually a reflex of the worries and interests of the President. 578

So, in all, initial experiences of decentralization and its consequences for the political parties cover different dimensions; rich-state/poor state, opposition vs. government regional party, as well as more or less “genuine” dedication towards decentralization of political leaders at the lower political-territorial levels. All these aspects have implications for the party system and the respective internal structure and decision-power of each party. The mere fact that the maximum regional and municipal political leaders now are elected popularly in itself (and with the possibility to get re-elected) created new tensions in the party system, including in the traditional parties AD and COPEI, as I have shown in this chapter.

FROM PARTYARCHY TO CHAVISMO

The Venezuelan democracy, in my opinion, was born under clear authoritarian signs. The roots of the crisis go back to the inequalities among the three powers of government: Since 1958, we’ve had a democracy with a highly concentrated and centralized power in the executive branch, with a weaker legislative branch and a judicial branch strongly influenced by the executive, political parties, and economic forces. In addition, the nature of the political party system in Venezuela is Leninist, with power concentrated in a cúpula (small controlling group) and very limited internal democracy. The Venezuelan state was also infected by these autocratic characteristics of the parties. The crisis, therefore, has to do with the contradictions between a system that proclaims the values of liberty, equality, and citizen participation, and the frankly restricted nature of decision-making.579

During its first decade of functioning, decentralization had indeed contributed to the break-up of the previous AD-COPEI domination at all political-territorial levels. As argued, decentralization was introduced in a moment of drastically decreasing socio-economic conditions for the citizens. The traditional political leadership suffered from lack of credibility and legitimacy, while, as previously shown, alternative political movements arose as political options, first in the regions and later at the national level. The Venezuelan Jesuit priest and political scientist Arturo Sosa argues that a prolonged breakdown of the traditional political party system was manifested between the Caracazo riots and the elections of 1998. For Sosa, the legitimacy crisis of the political system was based on the difficulty citizens had in understanding their decreasing socio-economic living conditions. He states that the political legitimacy in Venezuela is tied to two fundamental elements:

A) The efficiency of the State in the production and maintenance of conditions for access to a life of high quality for the whole population, and;

B) Democracy as a model for making collective decisions and putting them into practice by the government of the State.580

Venezuelan political scientist Angel Alvarez approaches the crisis of the hegemonic bipartisan political system and presents a few explicatory factors for the decline of AD and COPEI in Venezuelan politics. First of all, Alvarez mentions public opinion and the constant criticism of the behavior of the political parties, which also contributed to decreasing party affiliation via the general credibility crisis of traditional politicians. Second, the general changes in State-society relationships are emphasized, among them the new conditions for organized labor, historically of fundamental importance for AD. Furthermore, the advances of democratization and decentralization opened up possibilities to participate in national politics, and also changed the electoral behavior of the Venezuelan people. Owing to these changes, elections and possibilities of vote splitting have multiplied. With general discontent comes increased electoral abstention, as demonstrated in the figure on the sources of the political parties’ credibility crisis. In this process, the political parties lost credibility in favor of other elite groups and institutions.  

Decentralization alone does not explain the whole transformation of the Venezuelan political society, but it did indeed contribute strongly to a definitive undermining of partyarchy. In terms of the opening of the “doors” to political government and the State, as discussed in the theoretical chapter on political opportunities, decentralization provided the new, more open structural framework and accesses for alternative political actors.

There are other factors, though, that feed into the breakdown of partyarchy. The political system established with the Punto Fijo Pact is referred to by Daniel Levine as “The Old Regime,” drawing a parallel to the Tocquevillian studies of democracy in France and the United States of America. For Levine, the collapse of the old political system (and of partyarchy) stems from continual internal and international criticism of the political system (thus concurring with Alvarez). Since the early 1980’s, scholars and journalists have blamed the traditional leadership for all types of societal ills. This contributed to a weakening of the political system via an undermining of its legitimacy, which in comparison to Latin America as a whole was not that bad. However, other explicatory factors for the final breakdown of the AD-COPEI partyarchic model are mentioned by Levine: “elite and mass defections, leadership failure, organizational rigidities,

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581 Alvarez, 1996.
institutional immobilism and inefficacy, declining legitimacy, and the limited capacity of new movements to consolidate into viable political alternatives.” These factors behind the eventual failures and credibility crisis of the traditional system without doubt functioned as a source of pressure before the decentralization reform, as previously argued. For Salamanca, the traditional Venezuelan political society experienced a deepening crisis of party identification between 1984 and 1994 that indicated a search and preference for a new kind of leadership, with anti-partisan or anti-system leaders such as Hugo Chávez. This party identification period among the citizens initiated during the writing of the COPRE (heavily debated in media) and concluded after the 1993 presidential elections, which I hold is enormously important to consider in the light of decentralization and its effects on the party system. Decentralization opened the political society both for non-traditional, regional actors, thus undermining partyarchy, and likewise more authoritarian actors could be achieved as attractive options on behalf of the electorate.

The political movement of Hugo Chávez, as well as Causa R and PPT, was early identified with clear anti-neo-liberal strategies and discourses. Aníbal Romero sees two key variables for understanding the disenchantment of the Venezuelans with their political leaders. First of all, Romero refers to the so-called “frustration index,” that is, the level of support (or lack of support) for each government administration eight months after its inauguration. The second variable is electoral abstention. Indirectly linked to the frustration index and the general discontent is a brilliant illustrative model by Crisp of the policy-making processes in Venezuela until 1993. Besides showing citizens’ frustration over political leaders and institutional inefficiency, the repression of representation of social and political movements in the political society is indirectly manifest in the model. The overall result is the emergence of political and economic crises and an urgent need of reforms:

583 Salamanca, 1997: 235-237. See also Rivas Leone, 2002 a & b.
With decentralization, several of the fields presented in the model have undergone changes, particularly “limited civil society,” with increased opportunities to compete for political posts and with possible in-built impacts on the party system. Also, the actors within the fields of “consultative politics” and the “economic development strategy and government spending” have experienced emerging competition from new intruding actors.

Another relevant tendency among the new generation of politicians and analysts, directly related to Levine’s hypothesis on the effects of the constant criticism aimed at the Venezuelan traditional parties and the party

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system as a whole, can be described in the anti-party approach. Seen from the vantage point of the Venezuelan electorate, as demonstrated earlier, punishment voting (voto castigo), voting against and not for a candidate, adds another dimension to the anti-party pattern. So, the negative and destructive action process can be said to be double. In the case of Chávez, however, I do not say that Venezuelans voted for him only to punish the “guilty” adecos and copeyanos.

The theoretical and practical existence of anti-politics movements historically dates back to the populist tradition and its anti-establishment features. Traditional political elites (AD and COPEI) were blamed more and more for all societal ills, and this strategy was convenient for the opposition to use to gain popular support, since this disenchantment and the direction of the guilt for the crisis had become close to general among the Venezuelan electorate. Another interesting background factor is presented by Ellner, who believes that the credibility and legitimacy crises had much to do with the fact that Presidents Perez and Caldera in 1988 and 1993 were elected as anti-neo-liberal candidates and ended up imposing radical neo-liberal changes. These switches consequently deepened the feelings of betrayal on the part of the electorate.

For Moisés Naím, minister in the second government of Pérez, the rupture of the two-party hegemonic system was the result of too many weak political actors, not too few strong ones. That is, a fragmentation of political power took place. These ideas are fundamental among many social movement theorists, like the consequences of the snowball effect, for example, when the advances of one movement encourage others. Naím blames decentralization indirectly for the definitive breakdown of the old regime, a reform introduced by a government in which he held a key position. I am saying neither that Naím actually pointed to decentralization per se as the one and only explanation, nor that the government lacked good ambitions with the reform. As argued, the economic crisis brought forward other circumstances in the shape of the factors that Levine mentioned, such as lack of institutional flexibility and ability to adapt to new realities due to system structure rigidity. Political decentralization was only one of the program points of President Pérez when he took office, if we recall the

586 Rivas Leone, 2003, 2002 a & b; Lalander, 2002 a & b.
587 Ellner, 2002.
economic package and the subsequent *Caracazo*, episodes that without doubt added fuel to the fire of disenchantment. Theoretically, the repression of outside actors, such as social and political movements, is easier for authorities when the economic conditions are favorable for them, and vice versa.

In a comparative work on Latin American social and political movements, Escobar and Alvarez demonstrate that as one result of the struggles of some of the more persistent movements, the political space has divided into new situations in which a variety of social actors establish their respective territories. This process leads overall to a fragmentation of the political, societal, and State arenas involved.\(^{589}\) A connection between socio-economic deterioration and decentralization can be discerned through the above reasoning. Returning to the main theoretical section on political opportunities and the degree of State strength as decisive for the relative probability of challengers to be successful in mobilization, political decentralization and its in-built function of opening the political system can be fruitfully applied in this analysis.

**Proyecto Carabobo-Venezuela and IRENE**

After the presidential elections of 1993, decentralization had brought about important transformations also on the national level, as discussed in the previous chapter. AD and COPEI no longer dominated the parliament, and as has been described, several important governorships (and to a lesser extent mayoralties) were now controlled by opposition and non-traditional parties. Notwithstanding these developments, as the Caldera government had frozen the advances of decentralization, the relationship between the center and the regions was far from harmonious. Already in 1994, Coppedge predicted that conflicts between the central government and the governors would intensify, since the most effective governors (those re-elected in 1992) would become “lame ducks” as the 1995 elections came closer. Furthermore, President Caldera’s authority was

harshly questioned by some of these governors with presidential ambitions.\textsuperscript{590}

There are exceptions, though, as we have seen in the previous chapters, with relatively successful governors and mayors who enjoyed increased popular support and maintained political power in their respective territories. As in the presidential elections of 1993, the majority of the 1998 candidates offered successful experiences in the Venezuelan decentralization processes. Henrique Salas Römer had been governor of the Carabobo state for two terms representing COPEI. But before the 1995 regional elections, he formed the \textit{Proyecto Carabobo}, through which his son Henrique Salas Feo then took over the governorship. As a governor, Salas Römer had grown popular through the development of job opportunity projects and domestic and international economic investment. The Carabobo state came to be generally perceived as an attractive zone for investment thanks to the efficient government of Salas Römer. During his regional leadership in Carabobo, the institution of a “House of Neighbors” (\textit{Casa de Vecinos}) was created to channel the demands and worries of the citizens, with an additional objective of stimulating citizens to participate in the process of solving their own problems. Likewise, the \textit{Casa de Vecinos} has aimed at supporting the formation and consolidation of community and neighborhood organizations and involving them in government projects.\textsuperscript{591} Ever since he took office in 1989, Salas has been one of the most persistent promoters of continued and deepened decentralization, including advanced decentralization of economic resources and authorities, and political decision-making.\textsuperscript{592}

The presidential candidate who, according to the electoral preference surveys, up until a year before the presidential elections already seemed to have the triumph in her hands was Irene Sáez, mayor of Chacao and a former Miss Universe in 1981. After academic studies, she was elected mayor of the Caracas municipality of Chacao in 1992 and 1995, initially backed by both traditional parties (AD and COPEI). Her municipal government was

\textsuperscript{590} Coppedge, 1994 b: 11.

\textsuperscript{591} Guerón & Manchisi, 1996: 373.

\textsuperscript{592} Proyecto Venezuela, 1998; Kulisheck, 1999.
characterized by close collaboration with civil society organizations and local groups. As Michael Kulisheck points out, Irene Sáez was regarded during her terms as mayor as an efficient and honest political leader, and her labor in reforming the authorities of sanitation, police and ambulance services is well known. The popular hope for Sáez before the presidential elections was that her successful experiences in Chacao could be extended to the whole of Venezuela. Her main allies were business, neighborhood associations, the Church, intellectuals and academics. No less important was the support of young women, as I noticed during my field-work. A common answer regarding the electoral preferences of many young women in 1997 was:

Well, I would give my vote to Irene. First of all she is a woman, and as she says, a new alternative. Second, she has done a very good job in Chacao.

Both Salas Römer and Irene Sáez enjoyed popular support, since they appeared to illustrate a new kind of political leadership without ties to political traditionalism and a decentralist approach with concrete policies in their political territories. Salas Römer campaigned with the national extension of the Proyecto Carabobo party, now under the name of Proyecto Venezuela. Irene Sáez, on the other hand, no longer backed by AD and COPEI, presented a new party, IRENE, her own name but also an acronym that stood for “Integration, Representation and New Hope” (Integración, Representación y Nueva Esperanza). Early in 1998, she accepted an electoral alliance backed principally by the Causa R. Soon afterwards, though, she agreed to represent COPEI as well, and this led to the withdrawal of the radicals from Irene’s campaign. Her acceptance of the COPEI partnership also coincided with Chávez’s rapid growth in popularity.

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593 Kulisheck, 1999: 81. Critics of Sáez normally argue that it is one thing to govern and make one municipality more efficient, especially when it comes to a municipality with such a relatively small population (57,000 inhabitants) and such a high average income as Chacao (one of the richest municipalities in Venezuela), and another thing to govern the country. See also García-Guadilla, 1999. Some critics hold that Irene was purely populist and manipulated by business and other interest groups (Imber, interview, Caracas, 31 July, 1997; Romero, interview, Maracaibo, 23 May, 2000).

594 My observations and interviews in Venezuela, 1997 (several anonymous female informants in Caracas, Maracay, Valencia and La Guaira).
Electoral Reform and Traditional Parties in Crisis

The organizational structure of Acción Democrática, the internal crisis that Causa R is suffering, the struggle in the elections of secretary general of MAS, evidence the partisan centralism that drowns politics in our country. The candidates or sectors use decentralist language face-to-face in campaigns, and afterwards they change these innovation codes to traditional behavior. COPEI (too) has fallen into this.595

The most recent significant political and party system changes related to decentralization occurred through the regional, municipal and national elections of 1998 and 2000. These elections would not only change the political panorama on all levels, but there were new modifications of the electoral law and procedures that are likewise important to consider. In 1992-93 the electoral system had been modified to permit half the deputies to the legislature to be chosen through a mixed plurality-proportional formula (based on the d’Hondt electoral model). Separate voting tickets are used, and the twenty-three Venezuelan states further divide the electoral system into districts. The results of the proportional election decide the final distribution of representative posts. The same system was also used in the national elections.596

The traditional proportional representational system with closed party lists (which meant that citizens were not allowed to vote for individual candidates) was thus replaced by a mixed system, in which party lists were combined with the possibility to elect individual members of the Congress and the Senate. This modification in Venezuela goes under the name of “personalization of vote.”597 In addition, to avoid the risks of electoral fraud, the electoral process was computerized in 1998. Many political scientists, among them Carsten Ancar, emphasize changes of the electoral system as one of the key explanatory variables amidst party system transformations.598 But, as previously argued, the Venezuelan case requires several plausible variables, and since 1989 political decentralization had been generating massive pressure for increased democratization in the form of the modification of the electoral system. In fact, each of the AD and

COPEI governments since 1958 (and the Caldera presidency with Convergencia) had implemented (mainly minor) changes in the electoral laws.599

Before the 1998 elections, both COPEI and MAS suffered from deep ideological and factional divisions. COPEI was still psychologically crippled by the electoral humiliations of 1993 and 1995. Here too, the division evidently has a generational character to a great extent, with bitter antagonism between the historical leadership and younger renovators. The symbolic and actual hole created by the departure of its primary ideological leader, Rafael Caldera, had also contributed to the COPEI crisis. Many ex-copeyanos had followed Caldera to Convergencia in 1993, and others joined the political movements around Irene Sáez and Henrique Salas Römer, especially close to the elections of 1998, these latter two associated with decentralization and regional leadership.

As for the development of the radical party, internal conflicts and decreasing popular support had characterized the movement since 1993. In June 1997 the Causa R party divided, due mainly to conflicts between the Andrés Velásquez and Pablo Medina factions. A few months later the Medina faction presented a new party, *Patria Para Todos* –PPT– (Fatherland For All), which included a majority of the Causa R parliamentary deputies. PPT too rejects being a traditional party, being “a movement of movements” instead. The division of Causa R clearly illustrates the difficulty for “new” political actors to preserve internal unity when the organization grows rapidly and gains more political power. Once in parliamentary power (forty deputies through the 1993 election), Causa R was criticized for not achieving the promised legislative reforms on the agenda, and the party split debilitated the parliamentary potential even more.

MAS suffered from weakening and factionalism as consequences of the party’s participation in the Caldera government alliance. On the one hand, the historical ideological leader Teodoro Petkoff was a key minister (of planning) in the Caldera government, and Carlos Tablante occupied an important international government post. But on the other hand, the popular MAS leaders Leopoldo Puchi and Felipe Mujica had acted very critically

towards the government in the national Congress. To further illustrate the confusing features of inter- and intra-partisan behavior during the 1990’s, it is relevant to mention that whereas a faction represented by some MAS leaders formed a government with Caldera, in Congress MAS allied itself with Causa R and COPEI in the “triple-alianza,” as it was called. AD and Convergencia formed a parallel parliamentary bloc. MAS was, together with PPT, one of the first political parties to ally with the Chávez movement during the electoral campaign of 1997-98, and as a direct consequence of this the party divided between pro-chavistas and anti-chavistas. In this process, Petkoff decided to leave the party due to its alliance with Chávez. It is well worth remarking that two parties that were to a great extent considered decentralist became the closest allies of MVR, the political party of Chávez, in the alliance.

MVR started as a civic-military movement in the early 1980’s. But, it was not until July 1997 that the movement officially registered as a political party in order to be able to compete in the 1998 elections. Despite the fact that military officers formed the MBR-200, the leaders emphasize that MVR is, rather, a civic movement (or civic-military), and Hugo Chávez stated early on that the movement has always been against sectarianism and fundamentalism within the military. Now it is worth repeating that Chávez himself repeatedly expressed the priority of popular societal support, beyond the political parties. Among its supporters the Chavismo movement counted Leftist intellectuals, students, groups from the marginalized sectors (including the majority of street vendors – los buhoneros), some business and agricultural sectors, and of course, there was considerable support in the Armed Forces. The key strategist behind the intra-sector alliances during the campaign was Luis Miquilena, who arranged meetings with businessmen and politicians.

600 I recall the day of the registration in Caracas. Many Chavismo supporters closed whatever activity they were involved in to participate in the ceremony. The kiosk owner in front of where I lived asked me, “Aren’t you going? It’s today the Comandante is registering.” I recognized a similarity in the emotions of these chavistas to how causarestas perceived Andrés Velásquez earlier, but possibly with an even stronger fascination for the person, in the case of Chávez. His past as a coup-maker actually worked for him; people expressed admiration for this brave hombre duro (tough guy) prepared to risk his life for his ideals.

601 López Maya, 1996: 15-16.

602 Caldera’s Minister of Finance, Maritza Izaguirre, was contacted by Chávez and continued in the same position in the Chávez cabinet in 1999.
The Regional Elections of 1998

After 1996, a new wave of pressure on the central government from the governors strengthened, and regional leaders from different parties allied under the banner of Liderazgo Regional (Regional Leadership). The alliance included personalities such as Irene Sáez (IRENE), Fransisco Arias Cárdenas (MVR, Causa R, etc.), Henrique Salas Feo (Proyecto Carabobo), Andrés Velásquez (Causa R), Enrique Mendoza (COPEI), and other prominent mayors and governors. The Regional Leadership simultaneously protested against the Caldera government’s drawing back from the decentralization process and prepared strategies for the forthcoming elections in the matter of decentralization. Rather than calling themselves political parties, MAS, Causa R, and later parties like Proyecto Carabobo, Primero Justicia, PPT and even MVR, have referred to themselves as “movements” (or “movement of movements”), despite their being officially registered as political parties and thus having access to the electoral processes. Political parties as such had become so discredited, unpopular and blamed for the economic recession and corrupt behavior, that the “newer” political movements emphasized strongly that they were not parties in the traditional (AD and COPEI) way.

When Causa R divided in 1997, the party organized a great celebration party and electoral campaign platform at a jammed Caracas Hilton Hotel. There were speeches by Velásquez and other Causa R leaders, but there were several politicians from other parties or alliances, including a few COPEI unionist leaders, attending, and Arias Cárdenas and Salas Feo also took the stage with applauded speeches focused on decentralization and regional leadership. However, even though the event seemed like a success, strengthening belief among the militants in the political future of Causa R, the period that followed was characterized by silence around Causa R, at least until they backed Irene Sáez as a presidential candidate. It was also during this period that Chávez’s popularity started increasing, and the media started to focus on his newly registered party. The speeches of the other presidential candidates became more and more concentrated on Chávez and the risks for democracy in having a former coup leader as Venezuela’s chief executive.

603 My observations, 31 July 1997.
It is important to mention as well that due to the same fear of having Chávez as president, AD, COPEI and Convergencia united in Congress to accomplish a separation between the regional and the presidential elections, which according to the initial plans would have taken place at the same time. The separation of the election dates was achieved legally through a partial revision of the Law of Voting and Popular Participation (Ley Orgánica del Sufragio y Participación Popular) of 1998. It was also decided to postpone the elections of mayors, municipal councilors and members of the juntas parroquiales to the second half of 1999. One objective in separating the electoral dates was to enable AD (and probably COPEI too) to use their stronger party machines to get better results in the regional elections in November, which according to the plans would create a psychological advantage before the December presidential elections.

On the 8th of November 1998 the Venezuelans went to the polls to choose 237 representatives to Congress, 23 state governors, and 391 deputies to regional legislative assemblies. The number of federal regional states had increased by one, with the recognition of the Vargas state in 1997, to twenty-three. Vargas is exceptional among the Venezuelan states in that it is the only political district in which the territory of the municipality corresponds exactly to the territory of the state. The results of the elections of governors confirm the tendency that had deepened since 1989 of the popular preference for regional leadership, since seventeen of the twenty-three governors elected in 1998 were filling a second term. Sociologist Thaís Maingón concludes that these results indicate an acceptance of decentralization as a whole and a general preference for local political power in all Venezuelan regions. Likewise, the Venezuelan electorate apparently had learned to evaluate the benefits of vote splitting, leaving the more party-loyal tradition. Statistically, the party scores were distributed as follows, also including the elections of deputies to the National Congress.

605 República de Venezuela, Ley de Reforma Parcial de la Ley Orgánica del Sufragio y Participación Política, 1998, articles 1-5.
606 Despite the fact that the population of Vargas is bigger than the population of three other states with municipal divisions (Amazonas, Apure and Delta Amacuro), a process to establish municipalities has still not been initiated there. The state (and the municipality) is divided only in districts. Demands for municipal divisions have been obstructed by the central government, and likewise, the Federal District of Caracas (since 2000 the Super-Mayoralty of Caracas) has resisted increased autonomy in Vargas.
Elections of Governors and Congress Deputies in 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Party</th>
<th>AD</th>
<th>MVR</th>
<th>COPEI</th>
<th>PPT</th>
<th>Pr.Vz</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>LCR</th>
<th>Conv</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Governors</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Congress %</td>
<td>24.1</td>
<td>19.9</td>
<td>12.0</td>
<td>3.4</td>
<td>10.4</td>
<td>8.9</td>
<td>3.0</td>
<td>2.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The distribution between the parties can likewise be analyzed through an overview of the political-territorial map of the elections, based on the number of governorships obtained per party.

Political Map of Venezuela: Regional Elections of 1998

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609 The Causa R victory in the Zulia state corresponds to the electoral alliance behind Arias Cárdenas, launched by Causa R, COPEI and other smaller parties.
As seen both in the statistical table and the illustrative political map, a trend of decreasing domination of political traditionalism is indicated in that AD and COPEI together now control only thirteen governorships, compared to fifteen in the elections of 1995 and sixteen in 1992. Furthermore, several of the states where AD triumphed are small in population and lack economic and industrial strategic power (although not the Bolívar state). Speaking of strange alliances and contradictions in the midst of political opportunities and decentralization, the important industrial state of Anzoátegui shows an interesting example with the MAS party playing the main character. Nationally, MAS participated in the Patriotic Pole behind Hugo Chávez. But in Anzoátegui, MAS openly allied with Causa R behind Andrés Velásquez for the governorship, thus acting against the strategy of Chávez and the Patriotic Pole, which supported Alexis Rosas from the PPT party.\footnote{Author’s observations during campaigns in November and December 1998. Also, Benítez, interview, Caracas, 15 December 1998.}

MVR alone triumphed only in the Barinas state, the home state of Hugo Chávez, where his father, Hugo de los Reyes Chávez, won the governorship. He was formerly a teacher and earlier politically active in COPEI, although since 1998 he has represented MVR. In Vargas, the PPT candidate Alfredo Laya won, backed by the Patriotic Pole. The PPT, like its party of origin (Causa R), has since its formation in 1997 mainly been a regional political force, concentrating its electoral efforts on candidacies for state governors, mayors and seats in the regional and national legislatures. In Bolívar, AD repeated with Jorge Carvajal for the governorship. Causa R was still crippled by the division and its consequences in the form of some confusion both in the party leadership and among grassroots followers. Ellner concludes that grassroots pressure (planted by Chavismo) made leaders of parties like MEP and PPT feel obliged to support Chávez in the presidential elections. Like the MAS division after it backed Chávez, MEP was divided, and several of the party’s historical leaders left. PPT’s decision to enter the Chávez alliance was described by Pablo Medina in class terms. He saw that the PPT grassroots base (the workers in the steel and other industries in Guyana) was being eroded as a consequence of privatization and industrial downsizing. This situation brought out the need for a broader alliance, beyond the industrial working class.\footnote{Ellner, 2001: 16-17.}
If we look at the results of the elections of deputies to the legislative assemblies in the regional states, the distribution between the parties is quite similar to the tendency visible in the elections for governorships. But AD and COPEI show stronger backing in the regional legislatures. Similarly, if we compare these results with the elections of 1995, increased volatility and deepened fragmentation are conspicuous, as seen below:

### Regional Legislative Assembly Deputies, Elections of 1998

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Political Party</th>
<th>Number</th>
<th>%</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>145</td>
<td>37.08</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPEI</td>
<td>77</td>
<td>19.69</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>11.23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causa R</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>3.07</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MVR</td>
<td>62</td>
<td>15.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pr.Carab/Vzla</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>4.86</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergencia</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2.30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>3.84</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>2.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>391</strong></td>
<td><strong>100</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Chavismo & The Rebellion of the Governors:
### Presidential Elections of 1998

When I voted for Chávez, it was the first vote of my life. Why did I vote for him? There was so much anarchy in the old parties AD and COPEI. They had promised so many things and they were never delivered. I trust that Chávez will do a better job. He wants equality for all Venezuelans. He wants neither rich nor poor people. For him, we should all have the same.  

One week before the presidential elections of the 6th of December 1998, both AD and COPEI abandoned their respective presidential candidates in a

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612 Mascareño, 2000: 49.

613 Interview with a young male Chávez supporter. In and by Márquez, 2003: 203.
desperate attempt to get a strong alliance in order to confront the threat of having Hugo Chávez as president. In the case of AD, the party’s elected governors urged that AD abandon presidential candidate Luis Alfaro Ucero and instead support an alliance behind ex-governor and ex-copeyano Henrique Salas Römer, the only candidate who was close to Chávez in public opinion surveys. Finally, the governors succeeded in expelling Alfaro from the party whose founding he himself had witnessed. For some time, due to the diminishing support and credibility of the AD leaders, it had often been said that the adecos seemed like a couple of drunks fighting over a bottle, and this metaphor probably reached its peak in the presidential elections of 1998.

In the campaign strategies, AD probably committed one of its worst errors in selecting the “lackluster” Alfaro Ucero as the presidential candidate, and not one of the younger, more popular, leaders like Antonio Ledezma, mayor of the Libertador municipality in Caracas. Alfaro was probably the most influential Venezuelan politician for a long period, but he was not charismatic and did not function well in contact with the citizens or media in modern Venezuela, and the declining public support was the main reason for abandoning his candidacy. AD had already invested huge sums in the 1998 campaign of Alfaro; there were posters made of expensive material, for instance, which were all systematically torn down the week before the elections.

COPEI first supported independent Irene Sáez, whose candidacy had already been launched by Causa R. When COPEI entered the Sáez alliance, the radicals withdrew their support. COPEI had weakened dramatically and suffered from factional divisions, and close to the election was in an almost existential crisis. The Christian Democrats had approached both MAS and Causa R to suggest a future alliance in Congress. Again, the frequent emergence of un-holy alliances and decreasing party (and ally) loyalty is manifest within the party system. Under these circumstances, and within the same twenty-four-hour period that AD had expelled Alfaro, COPEI abandoned Sáez only days before the elections, to join the multiple alliance behind Salas Römer. With the official but partial backing of AD and COPEI, Salas Römer finally captured 39 percent of the votes, far behind Chávez and the Polo Patriótico (Patriotic Pole) electoral alliance that won with almost 57 percent of the votes.
In most Venezuelan states Chávez received a majority of the votes, even in Carabobo, the state of Salas Römer. But, confirming the value of the regional leadership, Salas Feo won the governorship, despite attempts of both Chavismo and the AD-COPEI traditionalism of the state to form massive anti-Salas alliances. The vote-splitting phenomenon on the part of the electorate between the national and regional levels indicates an acceptance of the decentralized political system as well as a rupture of previous traditions of partisan loyalty. In several states the dominant parties triumphed in the elections in their respective states (Carabobo, Cojedes, Monagas, Trujillo and Yaracuy), except for the presidential race, which Chávez won.614 This tendency indicates a difference in electoral behavior between the national and regional elections, particularly considering the triumphs of a high number of governors who repeated their mandate in 1998. Whereas the motivation of the electorate before a presidential election is based mainly on electoral promises and visions of the future, the development of the regional elections presents a more retrospective picture, particularly in the cases when governors are running for re-election. The citizens then tend to evaluate the candidate’s previous work and projects in the state during the mandate, and if it is approved, he or she is likely to be re-elected as a result.615

The abandonment of Irene Sáez and Alfaro Ucero as presidential candidates by COPEI and AD respectively, also presented the electoral authorities with a problematic situation, since the picture of Irene decorated the COPEI ticket on the ballot and Alfaro AD’s. This complication was solved through a revision of the software of the computerized program that registered the elections. A vote for Irene on the COPEI ticket would now go to Salas Römer, and the vote for Alfaro Ucero on the AD ticket would likewise go to Salas. As Julia Buxton concludes, these last-minute maneuvers by the traditional parties reflected pure desperation and probably also served to strengthen Chávez by creating an air of inevitability about his electoral triumph.616 One analytical vantage point for understanding the Chávez victory is through the lens of populism and Chávez’s capacity to mobilize human resources. With his charismatic approach, Chávez promised to clean up State institutions and punish the corrupt politicians and judges. This discourse appealed to the marginalized sectors and made people who did

615 González de Pacheco, 2000: 8.
not normally even go to the polls participate in the election in favor of Chávez.

Evidently the alliances behind Chávez and Salas Römer together captured even more of the total votes than AD and COPEI had in any election between 1973 and 1988, illustrating the immense and brutal fall of the once so dominating traditional parties. Another interesting aspect of the electoral results is that AD broke its earlier tradition of using strategic alliances in the regional elections. The eight governorships that AD won in November 1998 were all practically without allies. Nevertheless, this situation embraces various dimensions, and one must not simply suppose that the AD’s eight state victories were due to the popularity of the party. Rather, I argue, it is important to underline the recognition of the regional leadership, also within AD. The governors had evidently become stronger political actors, also regarding legitimacy within the party. This was proved later the same month when the governors and one AD faction succeeded in expelling Alfaro Ucero from the presidential candidacy. The strength of the regional leadership of AD was clearly proved during these dramatic days. Psychologically, it was very hard for many grassroots adecos to give their votes to a candidate who for them represented COPEI.\textsuperscript{617}

In terms of a deepening of democracy and the double responsibilities (to the party and to the electorate in the region) of the governors, this bloc action strategy defied party discipline. To a certain extent, the loyalty to the region came before loyalty to the party.\textsuperscript{618} If one compares the results of the elections, the electoral separation strategy of AD and COPEI did partly function, since the parties scored a lot higher in the elections for governorships and parliamentary seats than they did in the presidential election.

\textbf{Decentralization, Chavismo and the New Constitution}

After the presidential victory of Hugo Chávez in 1998, there was a series of referendums and popular elections through 1999 related to the rewriting of the Venezuelan Constitution. The popularity of Chávez was reflected also in these consultations with the populace. One example is reflected in the elections of deputies for the Constitutional Assembly, where finally around

\textsuperscript{617} Ruiz, interview, La Guaira, 11 December 1998.

\textsuperscript{618} Ellner, 2002.
90 percent of the representatives were considered *chavista*. During the working period of the Constitutional Assembly (ANC), a Mini-Congress (*Congresillo*), consisting of eleven members from the ANC and ten non-elected members appointed by the ANC, replaced the traditional bicameral Parliament. With respect to decentralization, the *Congresillo* used its power to get rid of political opposition leaders at sub-national levels. Seven AD mayors and the AD governor of the Cojedes state were dismissed.\(^{619}\)

Regarding the position of some of the most outstanding governors from different parties, opinions vary widely about the implications of the new Constitution for the decentralization process. William Dávila Barrios, governor of the state of Mérida for Acción Democrática, argues that the new Constitution includes an orientation towards political re-centralization and that the federal states are deprived of parts of their authorities and also that it contributes to lowering the stimulus for creativity in the regions.\(^{620}\) Irene Sáez, on the other hand, who won the governorship of Nueva Esparta in 1999\(^{621}\) with support from the Chávez movement, is more positive towards the new Constitution. She mentions its implications for the municipal and state levels and the creation of the regional departments (*haciendas regionales*). This institutional creation implies that the governorships should have the right to use the department for fiscal matters, including receiving the percentage-based amount of State economic support to the region that the law establishes.\(^{622}\) At the same time, though, the majority of the deputies defend decentralization, with some reservations, especially within the MVR party, as we can observe in the table below:

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\(^{619}\) Coppedge, 2000: 16-17.

\(^{620}\) Dávila interviewed in *El Nacional*: [http://www.el-nacional.com/eln061299/pd1s2.htm](http://www.el-nacional.com/eln061299/pd1s2.htm)

\(^{621}\) The elected governor of Nueva Esparta, Fucho Tovar, died and new elections were held. In these elections Sáez was backed by MVR and the *Polo Patriótico*. Sáez was not a candidate for the governorship in the mega-elections of 2000, mainly for the sake of giving priority to her new family.

\(^{622}\) Sáez interviewed in: [http://www.el-nacional.com/eln081299/pd4s1.htm](http://www.el-nacional.com/eln081299/pd4s1.htm)
Degree of Inclination towards Decentralization

Index of Acceptance of Decentralization per Political Party in %

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>PPT</th>
<th>MVR</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Decentralizers</td>
<td>55.2</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>37.5</td>
<td>31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>37.9</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>62.5</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centralizers</td>
<td>6.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>19</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Autonomy for the Governorships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>MVR</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>PPT</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>29.4</td>
<td>54.5</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>43.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>54.9</td>
<td>36.4</td>
<td>55.6</td>
<td>46.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>15.7</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>11.1</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/no answer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Autonomy for the Mayoralties

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Independent</th>
<th>MVR</th>
<th>MAS</th>
<th>PPT</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
<td>84.8</td>
<td>76.5</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>85.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
<td>9.1</td>
<td>17.6</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>10.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do not know/</td>
<td>6.1</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>4.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No answer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The tables confirm the perception of MAS as a decentralist party (even if 40 percent expressed being intermediate). The independent deputies present similar figures. At the regional level, both PPT and MVR are against autonomy of the governorships, whereas only a total of 10 percent take issue with the autonomy of mayoralties.

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623 Mascareño, 2000: 196. The inquiry was carried out by the research department of El Universal newspaper in 1999 and consisted of a question to each Constitutional Assembly deputy on which organizational form of the State they preferred. The question included an option of degree of inclination regarding the respondent’s preferences for autonomy for the mayoralties and governorships.
The first evident change (and one of the most criticized) in the 1999 Constitution is that the nation is renamed “Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela” (República Bolivariana de Venezuela). In the field of decentralization, the fourth article of the “Bolivarian” Constitution declares:

The Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela is a federal, decentralized State, in the traditional terms of this Constitution, and it is ruled by the principles of territorial integrity, cooperation, solidarity, competition and correspondence.624

Further, the 158th article states that:

Decentralization, as a national policy, should deepen democracy, moving the power closer to the population and creating the best conditions, both for the execution of democracy and for the efficient and effective service [prestación] of the [regional] state tasks.625

With the new Constitution, through which Venezuela changed to a unicameral parliament but remained a formally federal State, the nation now constitutes a kind of political exception in the world. Seymour Lipset demonstrates a strong empirical correlation between bicameral-unicameral and federal-unitary dichotomies, and concludes that “all formally federal systems have bicameral legislatures,” whereas nonfederal systems can vary between unicameral and bicameral legislatures.626 The confusions and theoretical variations related to decentralization is manifest not only in the discourses among politicians, but also in the constitutional text. In fact, the new Bolivarian Constitution includes fifteen direct mentionings of decentralization, which at the time was among the highest counts in the Latin American continent.627 Didalco Bolívar, governor of Aragua, clarifies his point of view regarding the tensions between federalism and decentralization amidst the Chávez government:

624 Constitución de la República Bolivariana de Venezuela, 1999, art. 4.
625 Ibid.: art.158.
627 The articles 4, 16, 157, 158, 163, 165, 166, 173, 184, 272, 294 and 300 directly express the term decentralization (or decentralized etc.) whereas several other articles refer to the functioning of decentralization. See also: Grimaldo, 2000, Brewer-Carás, 2004, for reflections on the tensions between federalism and decentralization in the Constitution of 1999.
Decentralization played an important role in the recent past, but today it puts brakes on the possibilities economic development in the regions. Further, it was the only thing that the regions withdrew from the leaders of the hegemonic centre in more than forty years of struggle to establish a true democracy. (...) President Chávez promotes federalism, understood in a modern and dynamic form, and as a correspondence in the search of solutions. Those who defend decentralization are anchored in the Constitution of 1961.”

In the arguments presented by governor Bolívar, a frontier between federalists and decentralists is discernible, which indicates a conceptual change of discourse and a significance of decentralization as something negative from the past. Another institutional modification is seen in the division of powers, which since 2000 consists of five public powers: besides the traditional executive, legislative and judicial powers, a citizen’s (moral)629 power and a Supreme Electoral Authority were created. The fourth State power, “the citizen power” includes the following autonomous institutions: the Comptroller’s office, the Attorney General, and the Ombudsman (People’s Defender). Together, these form the “Moral Council of the Republic” with the mission and power to supervise the adequate functioning of the public sector and to control processes of new and proposed independent authorities. The idea dates back to Simón Bolívar, who included a similar fourth State power in his Constitution. A further effect of the New Constitution is that it is not longer possible for the regional legislative assemblies (now replaced by Legislative Councils) to impeach governors via a rejection of their “Memories and Accounts.”

For Carlos Mascareño, a new constitution has been neither the proper nor the sufficient mechanism for achieving solutions to the dilemmas of decentralization. The tensions between federalism and centralism are still in force with the new constitution. Centralist visions normally rule at the times of decision-making, and historically the central governments have dominated the Venezuelan political scene.630 Simultaneously, two of the most influential constitutionalists from the opposition, Hermánn Escarrá (with a political background in AD) and Allan Brewer Carias (officially independent), stated that several constitutional changes have led towards a

centralization of the political and administrative systems. Brewer Carías gives the example of the public health system, and describes that according to him the decentralized entities are not accounted for in the responsibility for the administration of the health sector. Brewer Carías refers to the 85th article of the New Constitution, which states that:

The financing of the national public health system is obligation of the State…” whereas the Constitution of 1961 stated: “The financing of the public health system is obligation of the State…”


The night Hugo Chávez was elected president, the 6th of December 1998, he publicly announced that “there are some neo-liberal savages out there who want to privatize the health [system], the health [system] cannot be privatized, and it would be like a privatization of the very life of the Venezuelans…”

632 Chávez Frías, public speech, Caracas, 6 December 1998, and Globovision & Venevision, same date.
CHAVISMO, PARTY SYSTEM AND DECENTRALIZATION

AD and COPEI had experienced decreasing political influence since 1989 and decentralization. The victory of Chávez in 1998, as well as the splits of both traditional parties further evidenced the breakdown of Venezuela’s political traditionalism. As a direct result of the popular referenda on the new constitution in 1999, elections of executive and legislative authorities were planned, including re-elections of those authorities that were elected in 1998. Due to the separation of the regional elections from the presidential ones in 1998, Hugo Chávez and MVR considered these elections to be non-representative. Neither AD nor COPEI participated with a proper presidential candidate before the new elections in 2000. After the humiliation of the 1998 presidential election, AD and COPEI had been almost politically extinguished. Worth mentioning in this context is that the Chávez government also accelerated the collapse of the traditional parties by cutting off all public economic support to political parties.\footnote{Coppedge, 2000: 12.}

Mega-Elections 2000

The mega-elections were the biggest ever in Venezuela’s history. They included elections for president, deputies to the Latin American Parliament, representatives for the Andean Parliament, National Assembly deputies, state governors and deputies for the new state Legislative Councils, mayors, municipal councilors, and members of the neighborhood juntas. In addition, the voters of some Venezuelan states also voted for indigenous representation in the National Assembly and in Legislative and Municipal Councils; the Caracas electorate also voted for the newly created post of Super-Mayor of Metropolitan Caracas. The super-mayor (Cabildo Metropolitano) replaced the authority of the Governor of the Federal District of Caracas, the only governor between 1989 and 1998 to have been directly nominated by the president. The information for citizens about the electoral processes was massive, through television and the newspapers. The mega-elections were to have been held on the 28\textsuperscript{th} of May. But due to protests by opposition politicians and representatives of civil society organizations, and the evident lack of capability to guarantee the transparency and the correct functioning of the advanced electoral procedure, they were postponed to July 30\textsuperscript{th} the same year.
Before the mega-elections in 2000, the strongest rival to Chávez was his former soul-arms- and jail-brother, Comandante Arias Cárdenas, presented by the Causa R party and supported by a number of smaller parties (and also by ex-adecos and ex-copeyanos). Arias also had the support of several governors from various political parties, who argued that Arias as president would support continued decentralization and dialogue. Nevertheless, after a dirty campaign Chávez managed to triumph by a large margin, 56 percent of the votes compared with 37 percent for Arias.634

During the mega-electoral campaign, one of the parties that suffered from most dramatic turmoil was the PPT, which under noisy circumstances eventually withdrew from the Patriotic Pole backing Chávez. Having too little time, the PPT did not present a presidential candidate of its own but concentrated on the candidacies of governors, mayors and deputies to the National Assembly. Aristóbulo Istúriz, probably the second most influential of the PPT leaders beside Pablo Medina, said in a disillusioned tone when the separation was a fact, “We are not going to campaign against Chávez. (…) We only formalize what Chávez has already done: separated us.” President Chávez self-confidently responded that he did not need the support of the PPT, and furthermore he felt sure that a lot of the PPT grassroots militants would still vote for him in the presidential elections.635 This last statement of Chávez can be interpreted as a kind of recognition of decentralization on behalf of the president (and at the time presidential candidate). That is, from the perspective of vote splittings between the political-territorial entities. Similarly, Chávez’s skeptical view of political party loyalty can be discerned in the announcement.

In Vargas the struggle for the governorship was one of the more intense at regional level. The PPT candidate Alfredo Laya now lacked his previous support by the Polo Patriótico, which instead supported Major Antonio Rodríguez San Juan of MVR, who eventually won. Also at the municipal level in Vargas the candidate of the Pole triumphed with Jaime Barrios of

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634 For a discourse analysis focusing on the campaigns of Chávez and Arias, see: Bolívar, 2002.
MAS. In Carabobo, Salas Feo and Proyecto, Venezuela-Carabobo repeated with a big margin, as the only governor elected in 2000 without allies. In comparison, and as an example of the difficulty of calculating party volatility with the inclusion of alliances, Enrique Mendoza of COPEI triumphed for the third time in Miranda, but with the backing of more than thirty political movements. In Aragua, Didalco Bolívar of MAS won, supported by sixteen political parties, mainly of the Patriotic Pole.

However, the alliance behind Hugo Chávez, the Patriotic Pole, split during 2000, and PPT presented its own candidates for mayor, governor and deputies for the National Assembly. Concerning the position of President Chávez on decentralization and the mega-elections, in May of 2000 he publicly announced that he would trade governors and mayors for deputies of the National Assembly. The statement raises the idea that the president considered the centralized power to be strategically more important in the political future of the nation. The relationship between MVR and MAS has weakened since 1999, but the alliance continues in various Venezuelan states. In an interview in 1998, Hugo Chávez said regarding MAS, “The original projects of [MAS] were social justice, equality, freedom, democracy, and the democratic revolution; those were the slogans that I used to hear when I was a school-boy in Barinas.”

At the same time, the so-called “porta-avión” (piggyback) effect that so strongly characterized the elections for deputies to the Constitutional Assembly in 1999 might have lost some strength before the mega-elections. The porta-avión phenomenon in the context of Chávez can be described as the situation when almost anyone who ran for office with the official

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636 Rodríguez San Juan and Barrios campaigned together in 2000, both supported by Chávez. They formed a triangular platform of municipal-regional state-nation leadership for the development of Vargas, e.g., Jaime, Antonio and Chávez for the future of the region. The three would have joined forces at a final public campaign meeting in Catia La Mar, Vargas, before the elections, but that same day the electoral process was postponed, which meant that the candidates could not legally make political speeches. Chávez cancelled his visit, but Rodríguez San Juan and Barrios self-confidently took the stage without speaking, only dancing and showing themselves to the ecstatic crowds of thousands of supporters. Both won the elections in July, but after less than one year of government their relationship was far more conflictive. (My observations.)


638 In Gott, 2000: 127. Teodoro Petkoff too recalls Chávez from the years when the latter, through the local youth faction, helped the MAS and MIR parties paste political posters up in Barinas schools (Petkoff, Martínez & Pino Iturrieta, 2000).
approval and backing of Chávez was elected, surfing on the huge popularity that the president enjoyed at the time. The results revealed more of political and partisan pluralization, if we compare with the elections of 1998 and 1999, in mayoralties, governorships, and, particularly, in the National Assembly.

**Primero Justicia: The Challenge of a Young Grassroots Organization**

In almost all the Venezuelan municipalities, AD and COPEI have lost a large share of their political representation. As one example, in Caracas in 1995 AD held fifteen of the twenty-five municipal councilors’ seats, but in December 2000, the party captured only one of the thirteen seats in the important Libertador municipality, compared to twelve (i.e., all the rest) for MVR. In other parts of Caracas and the surrounding and penetrating state of Miranda, a new political party triumphed, *Primero Justicia* –PJ– (Justice First), which presents itself nationally as the second political force on the municipal and neighborhood levels.\(^{639}\)

Primero Justicia as a political party is the legacy and development of a civil society organization. The organization was formed by a group of law students in Caracas, and the movement existed as a civic association for seven years before the leaders of the movement eventually decided that registration as a political party was necessary.\(^{640}\) In this context it is relevant to remember that new alternative Venezuelan political parties have frequently emerged around a group of academics. As described in the background chapter on the birth of AD and COPEI, the universities have traditionally been one of the most appropriate platforms for opposition movements. MAS and Causa R\(^{\text{a}}\) too had previously expanded in intellectual and university environments. A more recently formed movement, the *Factór Democrático* party, which supported the alliance behind Irene Sáez in 1998, had its core leadership in a group of professional academics mainly from the Central University in Caracas (UCV). Primero Justicia thus regards its birth and leadership partly as a continuation of a political tradition.

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\(^{639}\) [http://www.el-nacional.com/eln05122000/pd4s.htm](http://www.el-nacional.com/eln05122000/pd4s.htm).

\(^{640}\) Borges & Morillo, interviews, Caracas, 22 March 2002.
In the elections of July 2000, the PJ party got “only” five deputies for the National Assembly, and three mayoralties. The top political leader of Primero Justicia is Dr. Julio Borges, a lawyer with an academic background at Boston College and Oxford, who has grown popular among Venezuelans for his appearance on the television program “Justice for All” (Justicia para todos). In the TV show Borges appears in a traditional judge’s robe and invites citizens to the studio to resolve their problems, mainly family and neighborhood conflicts. The regular presence of Borges and his party in Venezuelan media has contributed to a general growth in PJ’s popularity among the Venezuelan population, and its image as a possible alternative to Hugo Chávez and the MVR. Politically, PJ is perceived as a Center-Right party associated with neo-liberal ideas. Borges prefers however to place PJ at a Center-Left position on the political-ideological continuum. The origin of the party and its members in the Caracas upper middle class can possibly be an obstacle for the party when it comes to the task of trying to win the votes of the poor and marginalized sectors (which have identified with Chávez). In an article in El Nacional of April 2002, Henrique Capriles Radonski, mayor for the party in the Caracas-Miranda municipality of Baruta, emphasizes that:

Primero Justicia is not the COPEI of the 21st century, nor a reformation of the social Christianism, nor Rightist…. Some of us are center-Leftists, others center, and there are some center-Rightists.642

Returning now in this context to the theoretical approaches presented by Fals Borda on the development of social movements from micro to macro level and vice versa. The evolution of Primero Justicia is most interesting, since it can be considered to have gone both from micro to macro (since the initial mobilization activities in Caracas) and from macro to micro (using the television show to reach down to people who are also outside the Caracas region). Since 2000 the party has increased in popularity and organization and now has Primero Justicia centers established all over Venezuela. In addition, when it comes to the distribution of party and

641 Since May 2004, Capriles Radonski is imprisoned, accused by Chavismo of several crimes initiated during the turbulence of April 2002. The opposition considers the imprisonment of Capriles as a clear case of political persecution (Benítez, 2004; Blyde, 2004).

activity information via the Internet, PJ is probably the most active of all Venezuelan parties.  

Julio Borges emphasizes that along with the organization of civil society and justice for everyone, decentralization is a prime fundamental content of the political system suggested by Primero Justicia. Interestingly, PJ’s program points are rather similar, for example, to those of the new ex-masista party Podemos. In the context of the grassroots approach of PJ, it is appropriate to return to the dimension of neighborhood associations, since the party’s forms of organization and recruiting show traits of such associations. This is not particularly strange, though, since PJ started at that level. This is also true of another important political (but not party) movement, Queremos Eligir (We Want to Vote), led by pioneer activist Elias Santana. Queremos Eligir has dominated the non-party neighborhood scene since the 1990’s. The person who is probably the second most important voice and representative of Queremos Eligir, Liliana Borges, recently joined Primero Justicia. This partial symbolic fusion of the two movements can possibly be interpreted as a sort of recognition of the pure grassroots approach of PJ, despite its being a political party.  

Taking into consideration the political perceptions of Primero Justicia as an upper-middle-class, Center-Rightist organization, one might easily conclude that in the Caracas-Miranda municipality of Chacao, PJ partly seems to fill the vacuum left by Irene Sáez. The current mayor of Chacao is Leopoldo López of PJ. Julio Borges confirms this idea of mine and recognizes the achievements by Irene in the fields of sanitation, safe streets, and the ambition to combat institutional corruption in Chacao. However, one major difference between PJ and the political movement around Irene is the fact that Irene was backed by both AD and COPEI for her first municipal

643 My observations, and Abrahamz, interview, Caracas, 9 February 2004.
645 These two, Liliana Borges and Elias Santana, played important roles in the mega-electoral process of 2000. They were called to the Supreme Court as voices of Venezuelan civil society (and decentralization) to state their arguments for the postponement of the election date from May to July, which caused the Court to go against the declared will of the executive.
646 My interpretations, and Borges, interview, Caracas, 22 March 2002.
647 Borges, interview, Caracas, 22 March 2002.
government, whereas PJ so far has developed without such relationships. Nevertheless, there are at the same time some indicators pointing to stronger political support for Primero Justicia in traditional COPEI areas, as in the case of the Miranda state. All in all, this example illustrates a successive transformation of the structure of the party system. COPEI was initially involved (and in Chacao also AD) in both of the mentioned municipalities, but more recently the traditional parties have seen themselves ousted by new political forces. Former supporters of Proyecto Venezuela/Carabobo have joined PJ as well, particularly after 1998. Irma Blanco, secretary in charge of political discourses and program of Proyecto Venezuela comments:

Well, we do collaborate with Primero Justicia in the National Assembly, but at the same time we compete with them, since we have a lot in common at the same time. Without doubt we have lost popular support in favor of Primero Justicia. 

Decentralization, Party System and Chavismo

It is not a secret to anybody that Chávez is the one who exercises absolute personal control over MVR.

A few aspects of this political-cultural change in behavior on the part of the Venezuelan electorate are still worth remarking on. Decentralization has contributed to possibilities of vote splitting, and as has been emphasized, the electorate has learned to value persons or projects rather than political parties at all political-territorial levels. The appearance of the political movement around Hugo Chávez could at a first glance seem like a return to party control of the political system, considering the strength and dominant position of MVR in 1999 and 2000. However, as we argued previously, the victories of MVR on all political-territorial levels have more to do with the concentration of power and popular belief (or hope for change) in the person of Chávez than with preference for a certain political party or ideology.

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648 Blanco, interview, Caracas, 8 June 2001.
649 Rey, 2002: 19.
Debates on the need for internal party decentralization have been going on MVR since 1999. The issue constitutes a delicate and difficult dilemma on how to balance centralization with political-territorial autonomy, very likely a source of internal conflicts within the party. This personalization of the vote, in the context of decentralization and the emergence of *Chavismo*, constitutes a new political and electoral behavior. As an historical comparison we can reconsider the words of Juan Carlos Rey, who stated in 1972 that in Venezuela “you vote for the party and not for the candidates” (*se vota por los partidos y no por los candidatos*).650

Institutionally, MVR cannot be compared with AD in its heyday nor with its party apparatus. In a recent article on movement politics, Ugglå asserts that the party systems of the Latin American continent nowadays present a paradoxical dualism. On the one hand there are parties that hold a rather unchallenged political prominence – in several countries, for the first time – but on the other hand they lack institutional firmness and broker stability with civil society.651 Regarding the concentration of power within MVR in the context of decentralization, the election of mayor in the Caracas mayoralty of Sucre in 2000 provides a further illustration on how intra-party decision-making and policies can manifest themselves. Sociologist and journalist William Ojeda initiated contacts with Chávez early on, when the latter was still in prison, and Ojeda was a leading constitutional deputy for MVR in 1999 and 2000. In the mega-electoral campaign of 2000, Ojeda ran for the mayoralty of Sucre but was out-maneuvered by the central leadership of MVR, which launched the son of minister José Vicente Rangel (who eventually won under suspicions of electoral fraud). Ojeda formed a new political party in 2001, which eventually was named *Movimiento Un Solo Pueblo* (Only One People Movement).* Ojeda, like ex-governors William D’Avila in Mérida and Andrés Velásquez in Anzoategui, has repeatedly protested against the official electoral results. During my field stays in Venezuela I observed that many citizens in the Sucre area still called Ojeda *Alcalde* (Mayor) and saw graffiti on public buildings with the same message.652

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651 Ugglå, 2002: 143.
* The name of the party is not only nationally integrationist and with an emphasis on movement and not party. It alludes likewise to *Un Solo Pueblo*, one of Venezuela’s most popular musical bands, with deep symbolic roots in Venezuelan culture.
652 My observations in the field, and conversations with Ojeda in Caracas during the period March-May 2001.
Paradoxically, the attitudes of vengeance within the MVR grassroots took on extreme dimensions; practically everything that might be reminiscent of the old-regime politics was condemned, and this contributed to clientelistic behavior among MVR members. As Steve Ellner describes it, the argument of a definitive break-up with the political past evidently served to justify the pressure to “clean out” AD and COPEI militants from public administration, which opened political opportunities for MVR militants.653 Manuel Alfaro, AD leader in the state of Anzoátegui, said:

Here Quinta República [MVR] people go so far as to publicly demand bureaucratic positions from a governor belonging to a party they are allied with [the PPT] (...) and attack him for not being “generous” enough with them. Then what hope is there for AD and COPEI militants in the administration? What Chávez’s people want is to cut off heads.654

The Venezuelan political tradition of denouncing corruption has persisted also within the Chavismo context. For example, the President’s father, Hugo de los Reyes Chávez, governor of Barinas, has been accused of corruption. The ex-governor of the same state, Gerhard Cartay, claims that the Chávez family members in Barinas (among Venezuela’s poorest states) behave like some kind of nouveaux riches, with changes in life style and obvious economic improvements.655 Speaking of corruption associated with Chavismo, Lina Ron reveals that the anti-corruption commando that was created by Chávez in 1998 failed in fulfilling its objectives. The chief of the commando was Edison Contreras, popularly named caza-corruptos (“corrupt-hunter”).

653 Ellner, 2001: 15.
654 Ibid. Interview made by Steve Ellner in Barcelona, 10 February 2000.
655 From El Nacional (Sección Política), 19 June 2002. See also Ojeda, 2001, for a presentation of corrupt behavior of MVR militants.
I’m gonna tell you something, and they will get mad at me, but I tell you: They asked Contreras: Contreras, why haven’t you caught any corrupted people? And he answered: because if I did we would end up without comrades.656

The statement concurs exactly with William Ojeda’s publication of 2001; “The V from the inside. New faces, old vices” (La “V” por dentro. Caras nuevas, vicios viejos). It also has to be underlined that with new political opportunities associated with Chavismo, there was opportunistic behavior manifested by “old” politicians who abandoned their previous party ideology as Chávez grew stronger. Already in December of 1998 I witnessed meetings of the regional MVR organization in the Vargas state where I recognized former AD union and neighborhood leaders who had changed their white AD cap for the symbolic red parachute beret of the Chávez movement.657

It has to be emphasized, though, that the popularity of Chávez, especially in 1998 and 1999, and these party switches, were also a serious manifestation of hope for change and the belief that a strong charismatic leader (Chávez) was needed to change the political culture. In a personally (rather loosely) organized survey among academics in the cities of Mérida and Maracaibo between 1999 and 2000, around 65 percent of the university researchers and teachers confessed to being chavista militants or sympathizers in 1999, although in 2000 this figure had decreased to an estimated 15 percent.

The popular will for political change and the disillusionment with the political traditionalism in relation to the Chávez movement goes back to the second government of CAP and the popularity of Causa R in the 1993 elections. Many of the Venezuelans who voted for Causa R in 1993 gave their votes to Chávez in 1998 and 2000 (that is, they changed their preference from the decentralist option to a pronounced centralist alternative). Tello Benítez agrees with my observation:


657 Author’s observations in Macuto, La Guaira and Catia La Mar. Also some former COPEI sympathizers and politicians of the region openly joined the political movement of Chávez, including some aspiring to economic and political privileges related to the expected new political and institutional structure of the State.
That is true, I have seen and recognized a multitude of our former base-level sympathizers. With the red *chavista* berets on, here in Caracas, back home in Bolívar, Puerto Ordáz, in Maracaibo and Maracay, as well as other parts of the country where we used to have really strong support. What you say about decentralization in the context of Causa R and Chávez is correct in that respect; suddenly the political ideas and demands became secondary, though I confess that we –La Causa R– fell into a deeper problematic internal situation from 1995 onwards.\(^{658}\)

Benítez describes a changing of influential (and popular) actors within the party system, and likewise an apparent move from the decentralist grassroots approach of Causa R to a more centralized political model, which could be understood through the lens of a populist analysis. Nevertheless, even if the Chávez movement could be classified as the most personalistic in Venezuela’s democratic history,\(^{659}\) an apparent change of campaign strategy characterized the movement around President Chávez (especially in MVR) before the mega-elections of 2000, and particularly the elections of governors and mayors. Already in January 1999, Hugo Chávez announced that the time had come to conquer the Venezuelan municipalities too.

If we study the (imagined) political-territorial maps of 1998 and 2000 for governorships obtained by each political party, the growth of MVR is remarkable, going from one to ten in two elections. It must be made clear, though, that the discussions on which of the several aspirants for each place would represent the Patriotic Pole (PP) in campaigns for mayor and governor all over Venezuela were intense and extremely conflictive, resulting in divisions within the PP in most states and municipalities. Furthermore, the Venezuelan tradition of strange alliances in the regions continued in 2000. For example, in the agricultural state of Portuguesa, a stronghold of MAS since 1995, the alliance that supported Ivan Colmenares in 1998 consisted principally of MVR and MAS. But before the mega-elections, MVR decided to put up its own party candidate, Antonia Muñóz (who eventually won), together with Causa R and a group of smaller parties, whereas MAS allied with COPEI to support Colmenares. In other

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\(^{658}\) Benítez, interview, Caracas, 15 December 1998. Also local and regional leaders from other parties (including AD and COPEI) have admitted that they gave Velásquez support in 1993, like former mayor of Mérida, Fortunato González Cruz, interview, Mérida, 11 June 1999.

\(^{659}\) Lalander, 2004.
states the selection of candidates representing the Patriotic Pole functioned more smoothly, as Chávez recalls:

The governor of the state of Cojedes, South of Caracas, a big lowlands state, almost in the middle of the country, is Lieutenant Colonel, he did not participate in any coup attempt or anything like that. He was the military chief of Plan Bolívar 2000 in that state and in plain process of constitutional revision he comes to me one day and says: “Look, President, I feel like asking for dismissal.” “What for, boy (muchacho), you just hardly became Lieutenant Colonel?” “Well, the thing is that they are asking me here in the revolutionary parties to candidate for the governorship to throw the adeco away.” “Are you sure of that?” And, effectively, in a few days I received a letter signed by the MVR and the other Left-wing party of that state. With his candidature we also unified [in the PP] and resolved a problem that had seemed not to have no solution: the internal divisions. This boy succeeded in unifying us all, we won the elections and now he is governing. He showed to be a good leader. Of course, he traveled around with his guard in the villages, in the countryside, attending the people and that is how they started to see him as a leader. There are many cases like that.660

The “new” rules of the political game have thus been accepted also within Chavismo. Without denying the force of the national political level, it seems clear that a transformation of the party system is occurring on several decentralized levels. Likewise, political organizations from practically the whole spectrum seem to be aware of the value of political influence within the universities. During my field stays in Venezuela I have repeatedly witnessed how political activists from MBR-200 (MVR), ultra-Leftist Bandera Roja, and other parties or organizations have taken advantage of students’ or teachers’ street demonstrations, thus trying to intervene and make the situation more political to their advantage. To give another example of political activity in academia, back in May 2001, during doctoral studies at CENDES in Caracas, our seminar colleague (and former constitutional assembly deputy) William Ojeda presented his strategy for “getting rid of” the Chávez government via the 72nd article of the 1999 Constitution. This is the main political weapon used by the opposition since 2002.661

660 Chávez, interviewed in Hanneker, 2002: 34.
661 With the signatures of 20% of the electorate, a revocatory referendum can be held after half of the mandate on the continuation or removal of any popularly elected functionary, including the President of the Republic. This strategy naturally requires a great deal of grassroots mobilization. The idea of Ojeda’s mentioned here is only one example of how a
Party System Shake-Ups

With respect to the dramatic changes in the Venezuelan party system, one illustrative way of contributing to the analysis and the interpretation is to calculate the effective number of political parties on the national level. That means calculating the level of fragmentation, the effective number and the size of the political parties, as presented in the first theoretical chapter. Penfold-Becerra presents an interesting table of the evolution of the Venezuelan party system, with a long-term national view and a comparison with some other Latin American nations:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Country</th>
<th>Effective Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argentina</td>
<td>3.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bolivia</td>
<td>4.67</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Brazil</td>
<td>8.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chile</td>
<td>6.66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colombia</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Costa Rica</td>
<td>2.73</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ecuador</td>
<td>7.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uruguay</td>
<td>3.31</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela 1973</td>
<td>2.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela 1978</td>
<td>2.65</td>
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<tr>
<td>Venezuela 1983</td>
<td>2.38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela 1988</td>
<td>2.85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela 1993</td>
<td>5.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela 1998</td>
<td>7.34</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Venezuela 2000</td>
<td>4.30</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regional and municipal politician aims at achieving national political transformations via mobilizations at the lower political-territorial levels. I could probably without risk include practically all opposition mayors and governors in this scope (and of course government associates too, but normally not at the same time or with the same proposals or grievances).

662 Penfold-Becerra, 2000: 13. The figures for Venezuela in 1998 include both regional and presidential elections. The figures for other Latin American countries refer to the most recent elections up to 2000. The number for Venezuela in 2000 is based on the parliamentary elections of July 2000 and was calculated by Molina, 2002: 5.
One highly interesting aspect of the table above is that despite the overwhelming victory of Chávez in 1998, and the electoral concentration in Chávez and Salas Römer, party system fragmentation has increased even further compared to the 1993 elections. A point of clarification: in 1998 the parliamentary elections constitute the base of the calculation. Nevertheless, the transitions of the Venezuelan party system from two-partyism to multi-partyism since 1993 are very visible in the table. During the period of a centralized system, a low level of volatility and fragmentation characterized the party system, and the national figures above confirm the classification of a two-and-a-half-party system until 1988. The effective number of parties increased dramatically by 1993 and almost doubled the figure based on the 1988 election.

I have previously marked the 1993 elections as the rupture of the traditional partyarchy at the national level, giving credit for this change to the implications of decentralization and the emergence of regional and local leaders also at the national political level. If one adds the evolution since 2000, though, a re-pluralization would without doubt appear, since the mega-elections of 2000 were about as fragmented as the 1993 ones (even more so, if the municipal and regional state elections were added). In the Venezuelan case, decentralization thus matters to the political party system. In 1999, however, when Chávez was at his most popular, Venezuela approached an almost one-party system. Later, the results of the CTV trade union elections of 2001 contributed strongly to a weakening of the MVR position within the Venezuelan party system, whereas AD re-strengthened its position.

Party system change can also be illustrated through an analysis of how the system-sustaining parties score in elections. Sustaining, in this context, is based on the results of the previous elections; that is, one party can evolve from sustaining to non-sustaining between elections, as seen in the table below:

\* That is, if we were to base the figures (not presented here) on the constitutional referendums and elections of Constitutional Assembly deputies of 1999 (90% of the representatives were classified as more or less chavista). However, the abstention level was 62% in April and 54% in December (Political Database of the Americas, 2001).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Election Type</th>
<th>Winner / party</th>
<th>% vote</th>
<th>%System Sustaining party</th>
<th>% Non-System Sustaining Party</th>
<th>% Abstention</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
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<td>Pérez, AD, 53</td>
<td>94</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>18</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Legislative</td>
<td>AD 43</td>
<td>74</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>18</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Regional/local</td>
<td>AD 40</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1992</td>
<td>Regional/local</td>
<td>COPEI 42</td>
<td>78</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>60</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Congressional</td>
<td>AD, 24</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>Caldera, Conv/ MAS, 31</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>40</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1995</td>
<td>Regional/local</td>
<td>AD, 35</td>
<td>56</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>55</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Presidential</td>
<td>Chávez, MVR, 56</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>91</td>
<td>36</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>Congressional</td>
<td>AD, 25</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>46</td>
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<td>44</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>National Assembly</td>
<td>MVR, 46% of seats</td>
<td>21% of seats</td>
<td>79% of seats</td>
<td>44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>Municipal Councils</td>
<td>MVR, 39% of seats</td>
<td>28% of seats</td>
<td>72% of seats</td>
<td>74</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As seen in the table, AD and COPEI dominated as system-sustaining parties until the regional and local elections of 1992, to then drastically lose almost half of their support only one year after. Analyzing the entire table, the shift from two-party system to multi-partyism in 1993 is clearly confirmed. Two main explanatory factors for this evolution merit special emphasis: decentralization and the *voto castigo*. Whereas the former factor characterized the 1993 elections to a relatively great extent (especially considering Andrés Velásquez and Causa R), the latter, with Chávez promising to get rid of the “corrupt AD-COPEI oligarchs,” more strongly marked the process in 1998. However, both factors were important in both of those elections. Velásquez (in 1993) and Chávez (in 1998 and

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663 Dietz & Myers, 2003 b: 45-46. Due to varying types of party alliances in the different electoral districts, the percentages at national level are not exact. The figures for the presidential elections of 1998 and 2000 refer to the Patriotic Pole, i.e., the total party support behind Chávez.
particularly in 2000) have in fact benefited from both decentralization and the anti-system and anti-establishment discourses. Caldera too used an anti-system and anti-partyarchy approach in 1993, and Salas Römer as well as Irene Sáez were clear decentralization candidates in 1998. As argued previously in the section on the regional elections of 1998, since many of the governors repeated their mandate, approval of decentralization on the part of the electorate can be discerned. If we take a long-term view of the political changes on the regional state level, a lot has changed since 1989.

**Elections of governors between 1989 and 2000**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
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<th></th>
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<th></th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>6</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Causa R</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>-</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3&lt;sup&gt;665&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Proy.Carab/Vzla</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Convergencia</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PPT</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nuevo Tiempo</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>1&lt;sup&gt;666&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td>20</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the first place, we can observe that the loss by Acción Democrática between 1995 and 1998 is not *that* big at the regional level, even if AD and COPEI for the first time held slightly less than half of the governorships between them. Between 1998 and 2000, however, *Chavismo* achieved a dominant political position at the regional level. That development embraces several explanatory dimensions: the *porta-avión* phenomenon associated with Chávez, the withdrawal of State subsidies to political parties, and a certain resignation on the part of the traditional parties.<sup>667</sup> At the same time, the hope of radical changes and the genuine popular belief in Chávez and his political project should not be underestimated. I would also

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<sup>665</sup> Refers to Patriotic Pole alliances.

<sup>666</sup> The candidate for the governorship of Zulia, Manuel Rosales, was previously mayor of Maracaibo for AD, but now presents himself as independent from AD.

<sup>667</sup> Regarding the resignation and even paralysis of the traditional parties, see also Contreras Natera, 2003: 144-145.
repeat that a large number of the citizens who voted for Causa R in 1993 backed Chávez from 1998. Now, if we provide a national perspective on party system change, the panorama is indeed clear:

In a parallel analysis of the two tables above, the development of the MAS party is particularly interesting, since a first look at the figures could give the impression that MAS is the most stable political party during that period. Furthermore, MAS has obtained around 10 percent in the presidential elections of the 1990’s. But this is a picture that contains a

![Presidential Elections in Venezuela (1973-2000)](image)

In a parallel analysis of the two tables above, the development of the MAS party is particularly interesting, since a first look at the figures could give the impression that MAS is the most stable political party during that period. Furthermore, MAS has obtained around 10 percent in the presidential elections of the 1990’s. But this is a picture that contains a

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* In the elections of 1998, the percentage of MVR refers to the total of the Patriotic Pole, i.e., including MAS, PPT and smaller allies. The votes of Proyecto Venezuela includes the votes for Salas Römer by AD and COPEI.

•• AD and COPEI did not present proper candidates in 2000. Neither did Proyecto Venezuela, PPT and Convergencia.

••• Refers to the percentage of the Patriotic Pole. MAS contributed 8.7% of the total, PCV 0.9% and Socialista de Izquierda –SI– (Left Socialist) 0.7%.

**** Refers to the total percentage of votes of the alliance behind Arias Cardenas, of which Causa R obtained 19%, Arias’ own party 14% and other smaller parties 4.4% together. The 19% of Causa R is remarkable, and could suggest a recuperation of the radicals. However, the *voto castigo* aspect is probably a heavier explanatory element in this context. Many citizens stated that they voted for Arias as their only option for going against Chávez, not because of feeling politically attracted by Arias. I do not mean to belittle the importance and recognition of Arias as a governor, however. These experiences without doubt contributed to a quantity of the electoral support.
number of dimensions and that says little concerning the realities that have occurred in and around the party. MAS formed part of the Caldera government until 1998 and continued in this position after the installation of the government of Hugo Chávez from 1999. To mention an example, the former president of MAS, Gustavo Márquez Marín, was appointed Minister of Industry and Commerce. The tendency that was apparent in 1998 with regard to the position of MAS has continued, and MAS maintains control of four governorships. In terms of regional power, Convergencia is another stable party since 1995, whereas Causa R was left without a governorship in 2000, breaking the tradition it had had since 1989 at the regional level. In an historical overview of the Congress and its deputies, the more party-loyal trend is palpable until 1988, one year before decentralization, and 1993 again manifests the shift towards multi-partyism.

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COPEI</td>
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<tr>
<td>MAS</td>
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<tr>
<td>MIN&lt;sup&gt;671&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>URD</td>
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<tr>
<td>Convergencia</td>
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<tr>
<td>ORA&lt;sup&gt;673&lt;/sup&gt;</td>
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<tr>
<td>MEP</td>
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<tr>
<td>Causa R</td>
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<tr>
<td>MVR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pr. Vzla/Carab</td>
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<tr>
<td>PPT</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pr. Justicia</td>
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<tr>
<td>LAPI</td>
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<tr>
<td>Migato</td>
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<tr>
<td>Puama</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<sup>669</sup> My table, but based on: Political Database of the Americas, 2000; Buxton, 2001; Molina, 2000 b; Mascareño, 2000.

<sup>670</sup> Number of deputies to the new unicameral National Assembly.

<sup>671</sup> Movimiento de Integración Nacional (Movement of National Integration).

<sup>672</sup> In the state of Yaracuy, Convergencia formed an alliance with LAPI.

<sup>673</sup> Organización Renovadora Auténtica.
In 1988 the effective and relative number of political parties on the national level was still only slightly over 2 percent. In 1993 these figures more than doubled. Molina demonstrates that the elections of 1998 present one aspect of change and another of continuity. Whereas the parliamentary elections were even more fragmentized than the 1993 ones, the presidential elections revealed a re-concentration in candidates in 1998. 677 If we compare the Congress elections between 1993 and 2000, that is the elections that have been held since the introduction of decentralization, also considering the vote total in percentages and party system volatility and fragmentation, the figures are as follows:

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<td>ABP</td>
<td>1</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conive</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>AD-COPEI 674</td>
<td></td>
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<td>Apertura</td>
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<tr>
<td>IRENE</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Renovación</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total:</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>199</td>
<td>200</td>
<td>201</td>
<td>203</td>
<td>207</td>
<td>165</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Rel./Eff. number of Parties 675</td>
<td>1.96</td>
<td>2.21</td>
<td>1.62</td>
<td>1.83/2.3</td>
<td>4.8/5.2</td>
<td>3.8</td>
<td>n.a</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2.12</td>
<td>2.66</td>
<td>1.79</td>
<td>2.24/3.4</td>
<td>4.88/5.6</td>
<td>7.6</td>
<td>4.3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

674 AD and COPEI in alliance.


676 The second figures for parliamentary and presidential fragmentation from 1988 onwards refer to the effective number of parties (Molina, 2002 b). The number of parties in 1998 and 2000 refer to the effective number. The effective number of parties in 2000 is based on the parliamentary votes (ibid.).

677 Molina, 2000 a: 5.
### Congress deputies per political party

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Votes in %</td>
<td>Seats</td>
<td>Votes in %</td>
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<td>MVR-CONIVE*</td>
<td>-</td>
<td>-</td>
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</tr>
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</tr>
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<td>13,6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Eff. # of parties</td>
<td>5.6</td>
<td></td>
<td>7.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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\* CONIVE is the indigenous faction of the MVR. Votes for CONIVE were considered to be MVR votes.

** LAPI is the regional political movement of the Yaracuy-based political party of Governor Eduardo Lapi.

\* CONIVE is the indigenous faction of the MVR. Votes for CONIVE were considered to be MVR votes.

In the elections of 1993, 1998 and 2000, “Others” includes parties that obtained one seat each per party.

Despite the difficulty of calculating volatility and fragmentation with many parties and alliances included, the figures presented by Molina on fragmentation corresponds almost exactly to those presented by Penfold-Becerra (5.12 parties in 1993, 7.34 in 1998 and 4.3 in 2000). There is a slight difference, though, in effective number of parties (fragmentation) in 1993.

---

678 Consejo Nacional Electoral, 2000, and, Molina, 2000 a & b.

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252
Summing up the development with a focus on partyarchy in the midst of decentralization, something very important happened between 1989 and 1998, manifest, for example, in AD with the expulsion of Alfaro Ucero, which was achieved through the pressure from the party’s governors. The regional leadership triumphed over the central. One might ask if this was only a matter of the time it actually took for decentralization to really make a profound change within a party traditionally so centralized as AD.

**Re-Centralization and De-Partidization with the Chávez Government?**

Hugo Chávez has criticized the political and administrative decentralization, since becoming a popular political actor. This includes his questioning whether the autonomy of state and municipal governments is excessive. The new constitution of 1999 was supposed to correct these defects along with some feudal legacies from the colonial tradition, and to make central government intervention in municipal and state territories easier. But, as Ellner describes it, *Chavismo* failed in clearing up the administration of public servants with links to the traditional parties. The *chavista* movement in itself lacked the necessary party tightness, with competent and disciplined cadres ready to fill the mid-level gaps in the institutional bureaucracy and thereby be able to guarantee greater efficiency and the purge of irregularities. Furthermore, after the central government initiated checks of possible inefficiency and irregularities at state and municipal government levels, *Chavismo* became an easy target for charges of being obstructionist towards decentralization.681

The popularity of Chávez and the anti-party and anti-establishment strategies can be considered a kind of re-centralization of the political system and a type of shrinkage of democratic space through the partial exclusion of political parties. This new situation can also of course be interpreted as a return to Latin American populist tradition with respect to the leader-masses relationship. Like other populist leaders in the continent (e.g., in Peru and Ecuador), Chávez himself has confessed that he strives for a political system in which the political parties have less importance, in politics and in society as a whole.

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I do not lie awake at night for any political party; my sleep is disturbed by the organization of the popular movement…. The parties ought to be the expression of that popular movement, they should be the channels of participation and of influence for the organized popular movement, but they should not be able to hegemonize it. If they do not function, well, the popular movement should sweep them away…. The parties for me are like fairy tales.682

These anti-party expressions are typical traits of the neo-populist “anti-politics” and “anti-traditional-parties” approaches that have appeared during the 1990’s in Latin America (as mentioned in the section on populism, and indirectly also in the ideas of delegative democracy). The eventual anti-party standpoint of Chávez nonetheless displays a much more ambiguous character, manifest in a recent interview:

Everything is relative, the political party is always [inevitable], when functioning as an instrument of political organization, of participation, a space for discussion, for analysis and generator of ideologies, the generation of politics, and always if internal democracy is practiced, consulting, tolerance, in which ethical values predominate, then [the party] is unavoidable [imprescindible]. Now then, if we deal with an organized minority, with iron-rigid discipline and a vertical mode of functioning, where other interests predominate, personal or group, they [the parties] are rather an obstacle for democracy.683

A recent research report on parliamentary elites in Latin America confirms their ambiguous position towards the mere existence of political parties as key institutions for democracy. According to the study, 52 percent of the MVR National Assembly deputies consider that democracy would function without political parties. This figure contrasts brutally with those from opposition parties, with AD presenting 6 percent of deputies believing in democracy without parties, 25 percent in MAS, 19 percent in COPEI, and 25 percent in Proyecto Venezuela. The question of the preference for democracy as a political system has also been investigated. According to the figures, in MVR the support for democracy as a system is 84 percent, whereas 16 percent prefer another form of government. Even if the pro-

democracy percentage is indeed high, it is to be compared with 100 percent support for democracy in AD, MAS, COPEI and Proyecto Venezuela. 684

MVR and Chávez combine certain symbolic trademarks with the political movement. The Fifth Republic in the party’s name alludes to Venezuela as a State. The first Republic was established with Simón Bolívar; the fourth began with the Punto Fijo Pact. The personalization and concentration of political power in one person avoids the traditional institutionalized ways of doing politics, often with support by the popular masses. Another important characteristic of these anti-politics and neo-populist approaches has been the use of media, especially television. In Venezuela, Hugo Chávez has taken more advantage of television than any other previous president, which has evidently been decisive for his support and the development of a plebiscitary democracy. 685 In a more extreme form, populist plebiscitary leadership can be classified as a leadership without parties, to be compared with democratic leadership, which according to Ramos Jiménez (and liberal pluralists in general) will always be a leadership with political parties. 686 Nevertheless, it has to be emphasized that the great majority of Venezuelan television channels and newspapers are associated with forces behind the current opposition, and particularly since 2001 these media forums have been used for political purposes. On the one hand, the opposition controls the major part of the media, but on the other, Chávez came to power and remains there. As radical Bolivarian politician Lina Ron states on the matter of the powerful private media:

For the first time in their life, the [private] mass media, that always placed and withdrew Presidents, have failed with us. They are not infallible, they are not invincible, they are attackable, possible to destroy, they have run out of reasons and they are running out of the power they previously had. 687

684 Molina, 2003: 9. 47% of MVR’s eighty deputies were interviewed in July 2003.


687 Lina Ron, interviewed in Murieta, 2003: 62. Lina Ron has left the MVR and formed her own party, Unión Popular Venezolana –UPV– (Popular Venezuelan Unity), since she was considered too uncontrollable by Chávez and MVR. She remains chavista and Bolivarian, though, as do the majority of her UPV comrades.
The structural axis of MVR is often described as *caudillo-army-people*, as the platform for the proclaimed “Bolivarian revolution.”\(^{688}\) Compared with the populism of Betancourt and AD, one illustrative difference that indicates the higher fixation on one person and not in the party is precisely the epithet of the militants, namely *chavista* versus *adeco*. The political approach and discourse of Chávez have likewise changed remarkably since 1998, and particularly after the mega-elections in 2000, when a more aggressive and authoritarian style took over. While running for the presidency, Chávez concentrated on the promise to get rid of the vices related to “forty years of corrupt democracy,” to punish the guilty (mainly AD, COPEI and CTV), and to launch a revision of the Constitution (*Constituyente Ya!*). In a public speech in 1999 (one of many), President Chávez announced in a hard tone that there was no flow of money to the regions. He stated that there had been already too much corruption and disorder. The message was addressed directly to the governors and mayors of the nation. Arias Cárdenas reacted immediately, reflecting that:

… in the speech I got very worried since it is forgotten that we are zamoranos [*originally: from Zamora]: free land and free men, popular elections, a closer relation of power to the citizens. I think that we suffer a risk of putting brakes on the process. No state can support a return to the centralist model. (…) To say that there is not one bolívar for the governorships is to choke the Zulia state. We cannot accept distortions in a process that marches towards the constitution of strong provincial governments. We cannot accept that the resource flow to the state is paralyzed for lack of confidence…\(^{689}\)

The reinforcement of the central executive of the government can be interpreted as a re-centralization of State power, and thus a continuation and deepening of the centralist tradition.\(^{690}\) In Latin American delegative democracies, a common phenomenon in the decision-making and legislative processes has been that of *decretismo*, that is, the president

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\(^{688}\) See, for example: Ramos Jiménez, 2002: 30-31 (my italics).


* “Zamorano” in the Venezuelan context refers rather to the historic personality of Ezequiel Zamora (1817-1860), a liberal federal general and provincial caudillo who fought against the centralist governments of the 1830’s and 40’s. Zamora is one of the main mythic historical personalities of inspiration for the MBR-200 and MVR movements (besides Simón Bolívar).

\(^{690}\) See, for example: Hadenius, 2001 a: 127.
passes laws by decree\(^{691}\) (in Venezuela a heavy presidential tradition, particularly since the first government of Carlos Andrés Pérez in 1974-78). Most probably, this system constitutes an obstacle to efficient and effective decentralization and to the possibilities for local and regional political leaders to do politics.

**Municipal Political Polarization**

The political polarization has likewise crystallized at the municipal level. In July 2000, a parallel “Bolivarian Association of Mayors” was formed (la Asociación Bolivariana de Alcaldes de Venezuela). The new association includes 132 of the total of 335 mayors. The traditional Association of Mayors did not recognize the Bolivarian organization and, using the words of a Social Christian mayor in Zulia: “In the best case, this new organization is merely partisan [tied to the MVR, as distinct from the original association, which included all municipal executives since 1989].” The president of the Bolivarian association, Caracas mayor Freddy Bernal, declared in an inaugural speech that they “stood before a war to get rid of bureaucratic obstacles which make access to municipal government resources difficult.”\(^{692}\)

The traits of a delegative democracy as modeled by O’Donnell, and implications for its recentralization through the entrance of Hugo Chávez as the chief executive of Venezuela have been apparent since 1999, as is the confusion around the destiny of the decentralization processes. However, after two years of apparent resignation and paralysis of action within the political opposition, the authoritative style of President Chávez and the lack of concrete positive results have provoked frustration, most visible in 2001 and early 2002, among both the population and opposition politicians. Some of the most skeptical critics of both Chavismo and decentralization would say that the former has definitively extinguished the latter. I do not agree; as demonstrated, the decentralized framework is still functioning and continues to have impacts on the party system at all political territorial levels. Primero Justicia leader Julio Borges describes the most recent transformation of the Venezuelan party system:

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\(^{692}\) El Universal, 15 July 2002 (Sección Política). (The number of associated mayors might have changed since then.)
In this scenario, as a response to the crisis of the parties, new leaderships emerged; some of them came precisely from the decentralization; others offered a magical formula for the imposition of order.  

As I interpret Borges, both a kind of populism (or Messianism as many analysts prefer) and the decentralization process should be the keys to understanding the transformation of the party system, corresponding almost exactly to my key hypothesis of this study. It is also clear that, as argued in the first theoretical chapters of this book, in this context one process or movement does not develop and act alone without being affected by other developments and movements.

From certain perspectives, the populism and power concentration of Chávez constitutes a source of conflict for the democratization principles of decentralization. But at the grassroots level, MVR and Chavismo introduced a counter-movement (years before Chávez came to power), “the Bolivarian Circles” (Círculos Bolivarianos), against the traditional political parties and civil society organizations. Every little group at base level should be able to form a circle, as Chávez puts it, every fishing boat, every neighborhood block should get together and discuss politics in the Bolivarian spirit. For this purpose, local assemblies were organized. The militants of MBR-200 sought to train the circle members with study courses in national and international history. The idea was that frequent discussions on politics would help to overcome difficulties related to political inexperience and military rigidity. But conflicts emerged frequently between civilians and military people, on political leadership style, for instance. At the regional state level, the circles have succeeded in organizing regional assemblies as well (e.g., in Miranda and Carabobo). The decision-making process was similar to that of Causa R, that is, through discussions to eventually reach a consensus. With respect to the participation of PPT in the Bolivarian circles of the chavista movement, Albornóz explains that:

693 Borges, 2003. Compare with previous interview with Tablante on political opportunities both for parties at the regional and municipal level and for more authoritarian movements.

694 García-Guadilla, 2003: 190-191; Gable, 2004. For an official presentation of the Bolivarian Circles, see: http://www.circulosbolivarianos.org. Anti-chavistas have renamed these organizations the “Terror Circles” (Círculos de Terrór), claiming that the circles are provided with arms by the government for military preparedness purposes. These accusations are firmly rejected by both Chávez and the circles at the grassroots level.

PPT tries to evaluate the possibilities of grassroots collaboration from case to case, and often the interests of PPT-affiliated neighborhood associations coincide with those more intimate to MVR and *Chavismo*. Then it is normally no problem to unify forces at the base level. In other municipalities we [PPT] work more on our own, it all depends on the situation in each place.696

So, the Patriotic Pole is thus rather flexible at base level, confirming the hypothesis of increased division of political support between the political-territorial dimensions. PPT, as mentioned, has experienced hard conflicts with MVR, including directly with Chávez, mainly at national and regional levels, but still PPT holds some important cabinet posts, and the relationship between the two parties seems to have grown smoother during 2003. In an interview made in 2002, President Chávez expresses his view on decentralization and its relationships with the national political plans:

A contradiction is produced and it is necessary to look for a solution, and the only possible one is established in our Constitution, or at least one of the solutions. That is democratic, participatory planning and open discussion. They have accused us of being enemies of [de]centralization,* but really we are not, but indeed we are against the disintegrating decentralization. One of the five strategic axes of the national development project is precisely the deconcentrated decentralization. That is, we add the word deconcentrated to the concept of decentralization within the federal model.697

If we recall the theoretical differences between decentralization and deconcentration in the context of the position towards decentralization of the Constitutional Assembly deputies, of whom a majority of *Chavismo* representatives declared themselves against continued autonomy for the governorships, the suggestion of a pattern similar to the systems of Bolivia and Peru, for example, becomes apparent. Deconcentration signifies the transference of government institutions from the national center to lower political-territorial levels of government, but still controlled

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* A typing or transcription error appears in the material of Harnecker. It is obvious that Chávez is speaking about decentralization and not centralization.


from the center. In this case it would imply a return to the old Venezuelan system of directly appointed governors.

Participatory democracy and the deconcentrated decentralization, according to Chávez and Chavismo, should thus take place on the municipal and neighborhood levels (this could also be seen in the previously shown survey of inclination towards decentralization). Chávez indeed confesses that a central element of Chavismo’s kind of decentralization is precisely the deconcentration of political, economic and social power. He refers to other models of decentralization as neo-liberal, with the creation of power centers in the governorships. Like Caldera, who earlier criticized the governors for assuming excessive power in their regions, Chávez too is skeptical and calls them “true local caudillos, absolute owners of regional powers.” As early as the electoral campaign of 1998, Chávez was accused of being the re-centralist option and the enemy of the decentralization process. A few months before the elections he clarified that:

Decentralization is not meant to satisfy the bureaucratic appetites neither of political parties nor of pressure groups. Therefore, the best option is to create a new federalism. (...) The Constituyente [Constitutional revision] will create an impulse towards a new federalism that will guarantee the participation of the states, regions and municipalities.  

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700 Chávez, interviewed in El Universal, 15 September 1998 (my italics).
AD and Decentralization in the 21st Century

AD is promising a clear impetus for the decentralization process, which would genuinely strengthen Venezuelan human relations in democracy, where the respect towards each one of the states rules, and the future of each region is forged.701

As argued, it is clear that political and administrative decentralization has affected all of the Venezuelan political parties, but in different ways with regard to internal structure, strategies and power distribution within the parties. Paradoxically, if we look from a general national perspective, decentralization was not fully accepted as the “new set of rules of the political game” in Acción Democrática (and especially not for one conservative faction in the party’s national leadership, i.e. the Alfaro-Lusinchi wing). Former AD governor of Mérida, William D’Avila, describes how the centralized executive of AD ignored and obstructed the region’s initiatives, proposals and needs.702 Until the elections of 1998, AD was still Venezuela’s strongest political party and highly centralized in terms of the party’s institutionalization in Venezuelan society and its party machinery, including the decision-making process.

The quotation above indicates a new trend within AD, with respect for and promotion of decentralization and a strengthening of local government entities. Interestingly, Bautista Urbaneja mentions AD as a successful example with respect to the ability to redesign its internal party structure. He adds that AD managed to change its structure and routines more or less generally, and through this adaptation to decentralization the party

702 D’Avila, interview, Mérida, 10 June 1999.
gradually abandoned its tradition of Leninist party structures.\textsuperscript{703} After years of pressure from COPRE as well as local and regional forces in the party, AD finally changed its internal statutes in 1995-96, since, as its top leader of that time, Luis Alfaro Ucero, stated, “The times forced them to decentralize a little” (\textit{los tiempos obligan descentralizar un poco}).\textsuperscript{704}

The evident changes in the Venezuelan party system and electoral behavior can also be traced in the historical evolution of the previously hegemonic parties. In Latin America, the mass parties (like AD) that grew during the century have changed character and mode of functioning during the years. From having been mass parties that functioned as vehicles to mobilize and politicize the popular majorities, they have evolved into electoral machines, leaving behind the tradition of political education and popular mobilization.\textsuperscript{705} A common feature during the 1990’s of several of the emerging “new” political organizations is their reservation towards the voting procedure in internal party matters. Within the Causa R, voting is rejected with the principal argument that it stimulates internal party factionalism. Convergencia and MBR-200 have also expressed similar opinions and avoid the voting tradition, although the MBR-200 has had internal elections, for example, to choose its national directorate.\textsuperscript{706} Returning to the theoretical approaches of political opportunity structures and political party transformations, there are illustrative examples of how decentralization provided political opportunities and changed the traditional parties and thus the party system.

In Acción Democrática several of the divisions have originated through conflicts between conservatives and reformists within the party. Two instances are when former Caracas mayors Antonio Ledezma and Claudio Fermín left the party, in 1999 and 1997 respectively. A more recent division was the expulsion of William Dávila, governor for AD of the state of Mérida for various periods, and Timoteo Zambrano, former international director of the party.\textsuperscript{707} Coppedge describes how Luís Alfaro Ucero in 1995-96 purged all \textit{adecos} around Fermín from the national executive AD leadership, accusing them of being \textit{carlosandresistas} (associated with

\textsuperscript{704} Mascareño, 2000: 50.
\textsuperscript{705} López Maya, 1996: 22.
\textsuperscript{706} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{707} See also Appendix 1: Political Party Fragmentation.
CAP). In January 1996, he directed the expulsion of 10,936 AD activists at all levels of the party; a great part of these simply broke with the party through their own initiative around the regional elections of 1995.\(^{708}\)

Regarding the possibilities for the future of the traditional political parties in Latin America, first of all it is recognized without doubt that AD and COPEI are not alone in losing control of the party system in the continent. In fact, all of the strongest Latin American parties have seen themselves weakened and replaced by a new style of political leadership, including the PRI in Mexico and the APRA in Peru,\(^{709}\) historically the continent’s strongest parties, along with AD. Ramos Jiménez suggests that in the case of AD the new, weaker situation is harder than it is for APRA in Peru, due to the fact that APRA has had more experiences in opposition, whereas AD had formed the government or at least been part of the State apparatus until 1993.\(^{710}\)

Interestingly, AD seemed to recover and remobilize further in 2001, and this became particularly clear in the processes of the trade union elections, including the election of the CTV president in what has been called trade union democratization. The electoral process was characterized by fraud and sabotages, with consequent delays of the vote-counting process, and splits and factionalism within the parties and the trade union organizations (e.g., on the candidacies for the CTV presidency). The eventual winner was Carlos Ortega, for many years president of the Venezuelan oil workers’ union federation, and known as a political dinosaur within AD. In certain circles Ortega is deeply respected, but for others he is associated with rumors of corruption and sales of working contracts. A divided Chavismo competed with several rival candidates for the CTV leadership, but seemingly the position of Chávez towards the union movement as such contributed to the lack of sufficient popular support. However, a Bolivarian Workers’ Front (Frente Bolivariano de Trabajadores) has been created with the purpose of replacing the CTV on the national union scene.

\(^{709}\) AD has often been compared with Peruvian APRA. See: Coppedge, 1997; Rangel, 1982. However, Rangel might be classified as somewhat provocative referring to AD as “the Venezuelan APRA.” In opposition to the current government of Alejandro Toledo, ex-president (1985-1990) Alan García has recently led APRA more towards the right politically, and his leadership also presents populist trademarks and a lower degree of importance for the party apparatus.
A challenge related to decentralization in the context of credibility crisis is without doubt the renovation of the traditional political parties and other political actors of civil society. In Latin America, the political parties were born during the processes of modernization and creation of a centralist State system, with tight relations between social organizations, political parties and the State. On the lower political-territorial levels, it is noteworthy that AD and COPEI seemed to try to re-motivate and reorganize in various municipalities and states before the elections of July 2000 (e.g., the cases of the AD candidates in the states of Mérida and Zulia, and of COPEI in Miranda). The COPEI governor in Miranda, Enrique Mendoza, can be said to represent the strongest instance of a new-style copeyano government at the regional level (possibly only with Oswaldo Alvarez Paz competing). Mendoza repeated the governorship elections both in 1998 and 2000, in the midst of the huge popularity of Chávez. If we compare the presidential vote of 1998, though, Chávez won in Miranda, which once again indicates the impacts of decentralization on the party system in form of vote splitting. At the time of writing (April 2004), Mendoza is one of the strongest names for a joint presidential candidate of the opposition.

If we return to the fragmentation of AD and the adecos defectors since 1997, other signs of recuperation have emerged. Former Caracas mayor Antonio Ledezma has continued with his new party, Alianza al Bravo Pueblo, while many other adecos, among them two of AD’s most prominent leaders with respect to reputation within the decentralized leadership – Claudio Fermín and William Dávila – returned to the party. By late 2002, AD seemed to be one of the strongest forces of the hitherto rather splintered opposition to the Chávez government. Besides, as Fermín commented on the 61st anniversary of AD in September 2002, the structure of the party had apparently changed. When asked why several of the national leaders were absent, he answered:

Here are hundreds of leaders. There are thousands of neighborhood, union and peasant leaders. This is a base level directive. Deputies are also seen, like Alfonso Marquina, Henry [Ramos] Allup and Edgar Zambrano. In a mass party, the directorate is diluted horizontally among the masses. Conversely, in a political club there are only around
fifteen to twenty people. Here we have truly popular representation, and in AD the errors of the top leadership will be overcome for-ever.\textsuperscript{711}

**Coordinadora Democrática**

In February 2000, regional opposition leaders organized a political bloc in order to defend decentralization and strengthen their opportunities to defeat the MVR governors of the country (among other things, through a planned referendum process). The bloc was formed through a kind of “gentlemen’s agreement” (\textit{pacto de caballeros}) and included the governors Manuel Rosales (Nuevo Tiempo) of Zulia, Enrique Mendoza (COPEI) of Miranda, Henrique Salas Feo (Proyecto Venezuela) of Carabobo, Eduardo Lapi (Convergencia) of Yaracuy, Caracas Super-Mayor Alfredo Peña, Andrés Velásquez, Carlos Tablante, and Primero Justicia leaders Julio Borges and Leopoldo López (the latter mayor of Chacao in Caracas). The meeting was considered one of the most important actions so far in the ambitions to achieve an early change of the national government, that is, sooner than the constitutionally required review. All the individuals named enjoy strong popular support in their respective regions. A word must be said in this connection about the mega-elections of 2000, in which the MVR candidates in Anzoátegui, Cojedes and Mérida won by very small (and disputed) margins of votes.\textsuperscript{712}

In December 2001 the trade union confederation (CTV) and the business chamber (Fedecámaras) proposed an alliance to reach a “democratic agreement” (\textit{acuerdo democrático}) between political (and social) movements of the opposition to Chávez. Early in 2002, the basic principles of the agreement were presented publicly. At the same time, several opposition parties sought to achieve an alliance to confront the government and expand into a powerful political option. The partisan fragmentation, internal splits and intra-party differences and turbulences among the parties had created an image of an opposition without strength and direction, with difficulties backing one single opposition leader. These parallel movements,

\textsuperscript{711} Quoted in \textit{El Nacional}, 16 September 2002. Ex-\textit{adeco} and ex-mayor of Libertador in Caracas, Antonio Ledezma, has not returned to AD. Since he left AD he has led a new party, \textit{Alianza al Bravo Pueblo} (Alliance of the Brave People).

\textsuperscript{712} My observations, and \textit{El Universal}, 23 February 2002 (article by Fransisco Olivares in \textit{Política} section).
workers and business sectors, and dialogue between opposition parties fused under the name “Democratic Coordinator” (Coordinadora Democrática) –CD–. Other civil society groups joined the CD to exert further pressure on the government. Rosa Gónzalez suggests that the formation of the CD can be considered a re-encounter between Venezuela’s civil and political societies.\textsuperscript{713} One highly interesting illustration is that Causa R and Nuevo Sindicalismo now for the first time form part of the CTV, although this situation also derives from the “all-against-Chávez strategies” of opposition actors. That is, Chávez to some extent breaks with the golden rule of political leadership: \textit{unite your allies and divide your enemies}.

In April 2002, headed by the CTV and Fedecámaras, the CD organized a massive popular demonstration, which culminated in street clashes and several fatal shootings on the 11\textsuperscript{th} in the midst of almost total confusion. With military support, the opposition demonstrators via a coup achieved the removal and imprisonment of Chávez, and an interim government headed by the Fedecámaras president Pedro Carmona took over the government. After just twenty-four hours, chavistas initiated an enormous counter-demonstration demanding the return of Chávez, who in the early morning of April 13\textsuperscript{th} returned to the presidential palace Miraflores, backed by huge crowds of surrounding supporters.\textsuperscript{714} Since these demonstrations, the Coordinadora Democrática has deepened the pressure for political change. Between December 2002 and February 2003 an almost general strike was organized by the CD, which had the purpose of forcing Chávez out of power, but the strike failed in achieving its objectives. During the period of the strike, which lasted sixty-five days, the economic transfer of funds from the central government administration to the regions was frozen. Opposition governors then initiated protests and judicial actions to reclaim the resources that the central government owed them. Chávez responded publicly that the behavior of the governors was immoral and suggested that they should demand it from the “coup makers”(vayan a pedirselo [el dinero] a los golpistas).\textsuperscript{715}

\textsuperscript{713} González de Pacheco, 2003: 20-21.

\textsuperscript{714} The coup was condemned by all other Latin American heads of State, although not by the U.S.A.

\textsuperscript{715} Globovision, 3 March 2003.
Already during the strike, the CD militants organized collections of signatures in order to acquire the number of names constitutionally required for an advisory referendum regarding the destiny of President Chávez. Though enough names were collected, no referendum was held in February. The mid-term of the presidential mandate closed August 19th, the day when the Constitution could approve such a referendum, but a binding one. Chávez has resisted in power and chosen a passive role, ignoring the issue of the referendum.716 He states that if Venezuela needs referendums these days, they should be about the governorships (particularly those of some opposition governors). While the opposition more and more has reached unity and preparedness for an advanced presidential election, Chávez responds that he too is campaigning, but for his candidates in the elections of governors in 2004. However, a binding referendum was eventually held on August 15th, which the opposition lost under protests and accusations of fraude.717

In the midst of this tense situation of constant conflict, Carlos Mascareño admits that the Venezuelan crisis did not start with, nor will it end with, Chávez. Ever since the 1970’s a struggle for a deepening of democracy and a confrontation with the AD-COPEI partyarchy has been developing, as argued in previous chapters. Chávez was successful in capitalizing on the growing social and political discontent with the traditional political parties as he promised to get rid of the corrupt politicians and the poverty-related problems of the nation. Chávez also promised a model of a more participatory democracy, with greater social inclusion.718

In this respect, the re-centralization of the system and political power merits special attention. For Mascareño, as previously mentioned, the decentralization process had advanced during the 1990’s and according to

716 Looking again at the series of referenda held in 1999, the rejection on Chávez’s part for a popular decision on whether or not his mandate would continue indicates an unwillingness to publicly and institutionally measure himself against the opposition, in a political climate characterized much more by uncertainty and polarization. What is more, many analysts holds that Chávez in 2003-2004 is far from a position of being able to count on the massive popular support of the years from 1998 to 2000. See also Molina, 2003.

717 The official results gave the “No” alternative almost 58 % of the votes. That is, “No” to the immediate destitution of President Chávez. The international observers from the Jimmy Carter Center and the Organization of American States (OAS) recognized the official figures almost immediately.

718 Mascareño, 2002.
him, all studies between 1990 and 1999 indicated that the population approved of the reforms and recognized the elected political leaders at the decentralized levels as legitimate. Mascareño argues that Chávez never believed in decentralization and has therefore attacked it. He suffocated the resources of the constitutional *situado*. Likewise, the fiscal participation of the states has decreased from 30 to 22 percent if we compare the figures of 1998 and 2002. Mascareño (confessing his participation in the political opposition to Chávez) goes on to say that money the governors and the mayors should have a constitutional right to is snatched away, to be delivered instead “under the table” to other persons more intimately linked to the central regime. Moreover, centralized apparatuses have been created to administer fiscal resources. Major examples are the *Fondo Único Social* (Unique Social Fund), the *Fondo de Desarrollo Urbano* (Urban Development Fund) and *Plan Bolívar*, all of these run by the military, and other “revolutionary” projects that require central and/or one-person management. In this context, decentralization has suffered, even if the central government leaders have argued rhetorically in their speeches for “a participatory democracy.”

The point of view above is, of course, a voice of the opposition speaking; *Chavismo* would not agree, as will be evident in a forthcoming section on the future of the Venezuelan party system and decentralization. In the case of FONDUR, Victor Antonio Cruz Weffer and David López (both military men) reject the accusations of being closed and politically infiltrated and centralized as an institution. Rather, they emphasize the openness and flexibility of the fund and its close, open connections with civil society organizations in each urban project, including the consideration for democratic principles and the struggle against corrupt practices. Summing up the political polarization in the context presented throughout this book, Chávez in not the sole element of the current political crisis. Following (and agreeing with) Buxton:

Chavismo has prioritised the interests of the poor and this has created a zero sum framework in the view of government opponents. However the oppositions central demand, that Hugo Chávez be removed, either through constitutional avenues such as a recall referendum and new elections or political violence, will not alleviate the need to address the pivotal question of how Venezuelan democracy and institutions are to be

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719 Ibid.

reformed. Chávez articulates a sentiment that requires political space and which will persist even in his absence. In this respect, Chávez is very much a symptom rather than the cause of political crisis in the country.\footnote{Buxton, 2004: 29.}

**New Leftist Bloc**

For its re-founding, the MAS party ought to recapture the idea of the flexible movement of movements that welcomes into its core civil, neighborhood, workers’, sports and ecological groups that for the sake are willing to form a vivid political platform. Not only to escape from this institutional crisis, but also to deepen reforms and initiate a crusade against poverty and exclusion, rooted in a true educative revolution so that citizens can have access to the tools of struggle and improvements.\footnote{Puchi, Mujica & Tablante, 2002: 13.}

Several left-wing parties have participated in Coordinadora Democrática. After the fatal shootings (still under investigation) on April 11, the MVR suffered a crisis and the party’s key organizer, Luis Miqulena, withdrew from both government and Chavismo. The general political atmosphere was accordingly rather confusing and uncertain at that time, maybe even more so for the Leftists who were previously allied with Chavismo. MAS had experienced several divisions since 1998. One group of dissidents formed the Izquierda Democrática –ID– (Democratic Left) in 1999. Another split of MAS occurred in 2002, resulting in two parties with the same name, but with oficialista (officialist) added to the name (MAS-oficialista) of the MAS faction more tied to the Chávez government. The other MAS faction (popularly known as the MAS-MAS), led by Leopoldo Pucchi, who in 1998-99 had been the closest to Chávez of all MAS leaders, joined the fragmented opposition, also in the National Assembly. The relationship between MAS and the government had already worsened by October 2001. In a public speech Chávez stated that “the people of MAS are definitively no allies of this process. I ask them to take their suitcases and to leave, because we do not need them. Rather, they are hindering us.”\footnote{Bolívar, 2002: 134 (Bolívar’s italics).}

The “officialist” faction of MAS then registered as a new party –Podemos– (We Can) which includes the membership of forty elected mayors and prominent governors, such as Didalco Bolívar in Aragua and Ramón
Martínez in Sucre. The name of the new party was first to have been *Fuerza Federal* (Federal Force). The party’s national leaders, Ismael García and Rafael Simón Jiménez, underline that they have certain demands on the government of Chávez, like continued and deepened decentralization and the safeguarding of the social assistance and retirement funds.\(^{724}\) The value of the regional and local leadership is again expressed, even in a political party that is allied with the Chávez government. Other influential MAS leaders have left the party, like its former parliamentary chief Luis Manuel Esculpi, and MAS co-founder Pompeyo Márquez, who joined forces with Fransisco Arias Cárdenas in the new Unión party. The roots of Unión can be traced to decentralization and the successful experiences of Arias and his subsequent recognition as a governor of Zulia.

PPT also experienced a split in 2002, when the hitherto top leader Pablo Medina left the party as a consequence of a conflict with the party’s switches towards the government. During the spring of 2003, Medina, who since April 2002 has participated in the Coordinadora Democrática, formed a new political alliance – *El Bloque de Centro-Izquierda* – (the Center-Leftist Bloc) with leaders from Unión, MAS and other left-wing parties.\(^{725}\) The idea of the bloc is to form an alliance of Center-Leftist parties, without breaking with the CD and thus re-fragmentizing the opposition. Causa R rejected invitations to join the bloc; its 1997 division from the Medina wing still seemed to ache within the party. But Tello Benítez clarifies the standpoint of Causa R towards Leftist alliances:

> With respect to any Center-Leftist bloc, I tell you that here we have several groupings that are difficult to define as to orientation, due to the complexity of the present political situation. If we speak about Center-Leftist, you know that many groups present a Leftist element that we do not pay particular attention to, because the important thing is how to get rid of Chávez, and all those who are against him are allied. We are indeed interested in producing a change without permitting possibilities for the survival of the old politics and politicians [partyarchy] that actually created Chávez. We are ready to ally with anybody that could guarantee that.\(^{726}\)

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\(^{725}\) *El Mundo* and *Ultimas Noticias*, 21 March 2003; and Albornóz, interview, Stockholm, same date.

\(^{726}\) Benítez, e-mail interview response, 31 August 2003.
Going back to the Regional Leadership alliance of 1996-97, Benitez reveals that Causa R just participated in a series of political meetings with, among others, Miranda governor Enrique Mendoza, Juan Fernández (president of Gente del Petróleo oil workers’ union), leaders of Proyecto Venezuela and other political leaders. The 1997 division of Causa R, taken together with the Regional Leadership project, is particularly interesting to analyze from the standpoint of decentralization, Chavismo and political polarization. The PPT is now an important actor within Chavismo, in national government as well as in the decentralized political governments, whereas Causa R is struggling to recover within the opposition. In terms of decentralization, though, both parties are following the original path, but with distinctions in the selection of allies and collaboration between the political-territorial levels. During my recent fieldwork I observed that most PPT militants were telling me the history of their political movement as one and the same movement, that is, including the development of Causa R until 1997 as an historical period of the PPT. The party’s youth leader, Andreá Tavares, sums up the importance of decentralization for PPT:

In the political process that is developing in Venezuela, decentralization is most interesting for us [PPT], since in some way we can consider ourselves a pioneer organization in the subject of decentralization of government leadership. There was one opportunity when we got to be in charge of one local government, headed by the current Minister of Education, Aristóbulo Istúriz, when he was Mayor of the Libertador Municipality [Caracas]. Since then we have aimed at establishing an order focused on the neighborhood governments, and from there we try to develop this decentralization of local leadership.

Summing up the present political panorama from the perspective of Leftist parties in the context of decentralization and the party system, Venezuela presents a most interesting case of political polarization, with left-wing (and decentralist) parties in both opposition and government. In the present political polarization, the Venezuelan party system can no longer that easily be measured and analyzed through a study of the Left-Right political continuum, although Chávez has indeed managed to unite Leftist movements as never before in modern democratic Venezuela. The allies of Chavismo have organized in a common command group (Comando

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727 Ibid.
728 Tavares, interview during car ride between Caracas and La Victoria, 13 February 2004.
Among the opposition parties, Causa R is accompanied by decentralist movements such as Primero Justicia, Proyecto Venezuela, Queremos Eligir, Un Sólo Pueblo, Alianza Bravo Pueblo and even the “new decentralist generation” of adecos and copeyanos, as argued previously. Within Chavismo too, as will be described in the next section, decentralization is accepted as the new rules of the political game, although with some particular reservations in the case of the MVR.

The Future of Decentralization and the Party System in Venezuela

They single out the Law of Decentralization (1989) as a virtually dead letter. But a brief glance at the sectors that the law slated for decentralization demonstrates the contrary. The central government has transferred total authority of the port system, the salt industry, and several airports, as well as administrative control of the health system (in various states); at the same, state and municipalwide housing authorities and municipal police forces have been created throughout the nation. Expenditures at the state level have accordingly increased at the expense of budgetary outlays by the central government. (…) In addition, governors and (though to a lesser extent) mayors have emerged as political actors who have bolstered the legitimacy of the democratic system at critical moments and even wield considerable power in their respective parties.730

We are still only in the initial experimental phase of the Venezuelan decentralization program;731 fiscal decentralization has not yet been completely carried through. As already demonstrated in the introduction, the decentralization reform has had far-reaching impacts on the party

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729 On the Comando Ayacucho strategies before the regional elections, see Diario VEA, 2004-02-24.


731 Various academics, politicians and critics would say that ten years of decentralization should be enough time to show results, such as efficient institutions and officials in the municipalities and governorships. But this is very relative, especially when we consider the obvious resistance that decentralization met from privileged groups who were favored by a centralized system (both before and after the arrival of Hugo Chávez). In Sweden, for instance, decentralization, regional leadership and local self-government date back to the Middle Ages, and in its modernized form to 1861, when practically all Swedish church districts were transformed into municipalities.
system. In the quotation above, Ellner maintains that some analysts have unfairly belittled the importance of the COPRE reforms. For me, the impacts of political decentralization on the party system cannot possibly be denied, as confirmed in the previous chapter both through the interview segments and the analysis of secondary sources. One important achievement of decentralization, as Ellner too argues, is the aspect of the re-legitimization and deepening of democracy that took place in the respective parties through the reform.

What prospects for the future, then, could be given for the decentralization reforms in Venezuela? There is no doubt that citizens and political actors have started to take advantage of the political, institutional and practical possibilities that the decentralized type of democracy offers, manifest among other things in vote splitting, and which have been (and remain) reflected in the party system. Municipal and regional political authorities, principally the mayors and the governors, are generally recognized and have demanded (with different outcomes) the transfer of authorities, responsibilities and rights from central political control. Likewise, it is important to underline that the Venezuelan people seem to be satisfied with the changes related to decentralization. Molina shows in a recent study that the great majority of Venezuelans have a positive attitude towards decentralization.\(^{732}\)

In the context of the current political situation of the Chávez government, recent research on Venezuelan public opinion and political culture reveals that the majority of people, including those in the Chavismo movement, defend the existing decentralization system.\(^{733}\) But, as demonstrated, a relatively large number of Chavismo politicians are in favor of abolishing the autonomy of the governorships, while at the same time they promote increased authorities for the municipal level. It is also noteworthy that during the electoral campaigns of 1999 and 2000, practically all candidates (including President Chávez) presented themselves as the defenders of the “adequate” continuation of the decentralization processes. Decentralization

\(^{732}\) Molina, 2000 a: 14. One question in the survey was: “Another topic under discussion is decentralization and the leadership and government of the governors and the mayors. Do you think that decentralization has been: (1) very good (10.2%); (2) good (62.8%); (3) bad (22.8%); (4) very bad (4.2%) for the country? Valid cases: 1,311. (Ibid.) See also González de Pacheco, 2000.

\(^{733}\) Carrasquero & Welsch, 1999: 43-44.
has been included in the political discourses of all of the political parties and leaders. Gabrielle Guerón illustrates that even if decentralization has caused conflicts and controversies (as all kinds of power transfer do), a great majority of the local, regional and national political leaders consider decentralization irreversible.734 Another relevant factor that speaks in favor of the decentralized system is the strong identification of Venezuelans with their particular regional state.735

It could be easy to reach the conclusion that centralization, first under Caldera and then under Chávez, seems to demonstrate that the tradition of centralism in Venezuela is still alive and well. But this can perhaps be traced rather to socio-economic factors than to tradition. Decentralization has accentuated social differences since the creation of new municipalities such as Chacao, Baruta, Lecherias (Urbeneja) in Anzoátegui and elsewhere, which meant fewer resources for big cities and a privileged status for those living in the “suburbs.” On the other hand, decentralization has stimulated the advent of a regional leadership, which became relatively independent (even if the political parties, both traditional and new, continued to dominate politics).736

Though decentralization was blocked during the Caldera government and political centralism became further concentrated with the installation and development of the Chávez government, there have been signs of attempts to create functioning channels between the center and the regions. In January 2000, the Vice-President of the Republic, Isaías Rodríguez, officially introduced the Federal Council of Government –CFG– (Consejo Federal del Gobierno). Governors and mayors were to be integrated within the CFG so they could share their experiences. The CFG is presided over by the Vice-President of the Republic (who is appointed by the President) and is further composed, according to the law, of the cabinet ministers, the governors, one mayor per federal entity and representatives of civil society.737

735 See, for example: González de Pacheco, 2000.
736 Ellner, 2002 (e-mail response: comments on draft of this study).
The CFG aims to provide a form for “coordination” in which plans are discussed among representatives of the different levels of government. Alvarez suggests that the CFG is one of the most important innovations of the new constitution. Within Chavismo, the CFG has provoked emphatically opposed standpoints. On the one hand, National Assembly deputy Alejandro de Armas has struggled for tighter boundaries between the executive and legislative bodies, opposing centralized budget control in favor of increased financial autonomy for the states. On the other hand, former vice-president of the Republic Adina Bastidas proposed a model for reinforcing central State control over expenditures at regional and municipal levels. Likewise, Bastidas attempted to institutionally abolish the Inter-Governmental Decentralization Fund (FIDES). The basic system of the CFG and its functions was first introduced with the Ley Orgánica de Coordinación del Situado Constitucional of 1975, which was abolished by the Decentralization Law (LODDT) of 1989. This was the model that Chávez supported. However, governors and mayors from the opposition have criticized the CFG, arguing that it is a step backwards towards (re)centralization.

President Chávez has repeatedly been classified as a centralist political leader. In theory, though, Hugo Chávez has not been opposed to decentralization as a deepening of democracy and access to the political and State arenas. On the other hand, he took issue with some arguments and significances of decentralization, regarding them as a smokescreen for neo-liberal reforms as well as the institutional excesses and duplication of bureaucracy. As Ellner argues, the problem was that for a participatory democracy to work (a basic requirement if decentralization is to really function well), a thriving civil society is needed. In the eyes of the chavistas, such a civil society was linked to the Fourth Republic (the AD-COPEI partyarchy). Therefore they felt obliged to create a new civil society from above. This was not likely to happen, though, at least not in one blow. The issue of decentralization was indeed complicated. Chávez was critical of it not because he supported the partyarchy as a model but because it had contributed in many ways to the types of neo-liberal policies that he opposed.

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739 Ellner, 2002.
740 My observations, and Alvarez, 2003: 156.
741 Ellner, 2002 (personal e-mail response to a few of my questions).
In the same context, Julia Buxton suggests that the progress of decentralization during the Chávez government has been limited since the president has effectively reversed the process, freezing the funding to the decentralized authorities, as Caldera did earlier. For Buxton, both Chávez and Caldera seem to lack genuine commitment to decentralization, which has threatened to hinder the consolidation of the decentralization project. As I emphasized in a previous chapter, Buxton agrees that the financial aspects are most relevant to consider, since the regions (states) still depend on the center. However, she adds:

In political terms there were some real benefits – which you mentioned in the mail, but the problem was that the political system was already in deep deep crisis, so decentralization was always going to be misused by some people. I think Chávez has also shown that political parties in Venezuela remain heavily centralized, and power has shifted back to the center in recent years. If you are an aspiring politician right now in Venezuela, you have to be in Caracas. Ten years ago, the place to make your name was the regions.742

I agree with Buxton’s views, which confirm to a high degree what I discussed in the second and third empirical chapters of the book, covering the evolutions from 1989 onwards. Decentralization without doubt shook up the party system at all political-territorial levels. The fragmentation level becomes even higher when the party composition at the municipal and regional state levels is included. This party system fragmentation stems from decentralization with the mere opening of the political and electoral system that the reforms implied. Decentralization did not fulfill the most optimistic expectations, as argued, and corruption, clientelism and other irregularities at state and municipal levels remain as obstacles for the continuation of the process.

In connection to what Buxton says about the centralization within the political parties, I partly agree, although there are exceptions with more decentralized parties and relatively more autonomous regional and local governments. Generally speaking, though, Caracas still dominates over the regions, as previously argued, around the lack of sufficient economic decentralization. The next couple of years will certainly prove to be

742 Buxton, 2003 b (personal e-mail discussion).
decisive and turbulent amidst the party system transformations related to decentralization. At the time the manuscript of this book is being completed (August 2004), Venezuela faces regional and municipal elections in October 2004. The campaign strategies of both major political blocs present several surprises. Arias Cárdenas is running for the governorship of Zulia, against Coordinadora Democrática, which is backing current governor Manuel Rosales. In Bolívar, traditional stronghold of AD and Causa R, the Patriotic Pole is strongly divided. MVR has put up General Francisco Rangel Gómez, whereas Ramón Machuca, leader of the steel union workers, is running with the recently formed Venezuelan Workers Party – PT- and his own chavista alliance. In Aragua, the Pole is backing Governor Didalco Bolívar, while the opposition first aimed at launching Carlos Tablante, who withdrew in favor of Margarita de Tablante (wife of Carlos). The CD is divided also in the Super-Mayoralty of Caracas, where AD supports the candidacy of Claudio Fermín and the remaining majority of the opposition alliance supports current Super-Mayor Alfredo Peña. Chavismo is running journalist and grassroots leader Juan Barreto for the Super-Mayoralty. Though, similarly Lina Ron prepares for either the Great Caracas Super-Mayoralty or the prestigious Municipio Libertador.743

Considering the possibility of an emergent new bipartisan hegemony in Venezuelan politics, Alvarez (like me) is skeptical and already argued by early 2000 that the movement behind Chávez is too divided and too far from the traditional meaning of a political party. At the same time, the deepened crisis of the traditional party system has also permitted the growth of “new” kinds of leaderships and the emergence of a more totalitarian character in the MVR.744 It is also noteworthy that all of the bigger Venezuelan political parties have divided since 1997 (including the MVR), illustrating the pluralization and fragmentation of the party system and the respective political parties, as well as a decline in party loyalty. At the same time the electoral figures of 2000 on a national level show a strong concentration in MVR and government allies.745

The centralization-decentralization aspect of the entire political party system, however, remains central and likewise contradictory in the analysis


744 Alvarez, 2000: 7-9, 11-12. Alvarez does not use the term “totalitarian,” however; I merely interpret his analysis of the political movement of Chávez and the MVR (e.g., pp. 7-9).

of the present and forthcoming panorama of the Venezuelan political system, contradictory not only due to the ambiguous position of Chávez and Chavismo towards decentralization and the party system, but also with respect to the structure of the “new” political parties most associated with decentralization. I refer to the personalization ingredient of the parties. That is, even if parties like Primero Justicia, Proyecto Venezuela-Carabobo and Causa R promote a deepening of decentralized democracy, they are strongly identified with their national leaders (Julio Borges and Gerardo Blyde in Primero Justicia, Salas Römer and Salas Feo in Proyecto Venezuela, and Andrés Velásquez in Causa R). At the same time, though, this could be considered a consequence of the media coverage and its concentration on the national leaders of each party. Likewise, it is worth recalling that all of the national party leaders mentioned initially emerged through the decentralization process.

One thing is definitively sure: Venezuela’s political system now presents a new kind of opposition, manifest in the Coordinadora Democrática, with Causa R, radical-Leftist Bandera Roja, MAS, Primero Justicia, COPEI and AD in the same alliance together with a broad spectrum of new political movements and ex-Chavismo leaders. Most certainly, this alliance will have future impacts on the party system also at the regional and municipal levels, with new unholy alliances still to come. Also the near future of Chavismo at these levels and in the party system as a whole will most likely hold surprises both for the electorate, international observers and the movement itself.\footnote{Already, former MVR militants have joined other chavista parties, e.g. PPT, and even founded entirely new ones (as is the case of Lina Ron and her new UPV party), at the distinct political-territorial levels.}

The fate of the Venezuelan party system and decentralization now partly lies in the hands of the opposition party leaders and their ability to form a strong, attractive and unified front, including having a presidential candidate in common.\footnote{Just before the binding referendum of August 2004, the opposition allies unified behind Enrique Mendoza, after years of disargreements.} The question of whether they manage to convince the electorate in that case, I will leave unanswered in this book.
Conclusions and Final Remarks

The decentralization processes from 1989 onwards brought with it a series of implications for the Venezuelan political and democratic system, including dramatic and profound changes in the party system. I have demonstrated that the Venezuelan party system experienced a transformation from a bipartisan system to multi-partyism during the first decade of a decentralized system, with significant changes in effective political contention between parties on distinct political-territorial levels. The effective number and size of political parties have changed dramatically since decentralization was introduced, from the neighborhood level to the national. The political decentralization with direct elections of mayors and governors undermined the previous two-party hegemony, and manifested an evident pluralization and fragmentation of the Venezuelan party system.

Even if some first ambitions towards decentralization took place during the Caldera government of 1968-1973 (the period I label the ripening phase) and then with the Municipal Management Law of 1978, it was first with the 1989 reform that decentralization brought forward major political alterations, particularly in the party system. This study has demonstrated, not least through the interviews with key actors and scholars, that the party system (and its fragmentation) and political decentralization are intimately connected and dependent on each other. Partyarchy experienced a relatively rapid process of undermining from 1989, losing control over important mayoralties, governorships and municipal councils, and from then on AD and COPEI gradually lost their former access to economic resources and public posts to satisfy their clientele in regional states and municipalities. Both traditional parties became more and more dependent on alliances at these levels, and soon also on the national political scene.

Theoretically, the combination of actors’ rational choice and more process-structural approaches, particularly the use of the framework of political opportunity structures, has helped to theoretically understand the political transformations related to decentralization and its implications for the party system. With decentralization, the accessibility of the political society increased remarkably. The main actors in this political game have been termed “authorities” (AD and COPEI until 1993) and “challengers” (MAS, Causa R, Proyecto Carabobo, MVR, Primero Justicia, etc.) In terms of the
fundamental conditions mentioned in the political opportunity structures, the degree of openness of the political system increased (a fundamental condition for the availability and probability of success for political challengers). Further, the juridical framework was modified, passing responsibilities and authorities of administration and fiscal authorities to the municipal and state levels. The opening of the State structure that was introduced through decentralization permitted political participation on the lower levels. Accessibility to the State and the national political arenas has thus increased for social and political actors. At the same time, though, economic centralization still remains to a high degree, and since the introduction of political decentralization in 1989, regional and local actors have met a forceful resistance from the center, especially those from opposition parties, but also regional and local leaders from AD and COPEI.

Looking again at the double responsibilities of directly elected political leaders (towards the electorate and the political party central leadership respectively), decentralization has contributed to alterations in the political expectations and perceptions of the citizens. The Decentralization Law (LODDT) signified that the governorships became responsible for possible deficiencies at the state level. Ellner concludes that as a direct consequence of this accountability, many governors (especially those from opposition parties) have felt compelled to express their protests against the central government’s lack of (or ignoring of) authority transfers to the regional states. The rigidity of the centralized institutional, administrative and political systems, inherited from Spanish colonial rule, constituted an obstacle to a smoother decentralization process.

Owing to the fact that the new decentralized political system signified in practice that political leaders at the municipal and state levels now had more concrete double responsibilities (towards the party and the electorate), decentralization likewise contributed to a break-up of traditional party discipline. Earlier governors responded only to the centralized leadership of the party, as discussed in the second theoretical chapter with the ideas of Barbara Geddes on the double-sided responsibility of regional leaders. But since the governors have come to be elected directly, they now depend more on the voters’ satisfaction and (re)approval for their own possible re-election. The mere existence of the possibility for governors and mayors to be re-elected signifies a strengthening of the regional and municipal

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leadership in a longer term, and also decreases the “lame duck” phenomenon by the end of the mandate. At the same time, the relationship with the central party leadership continues to be important and not seldom decisive for the possibilities of local and regional leaders to carry through projects and policies.

Decentralization changed the political panorama also at the national level. Regional and municipal elections have frequently served as political thermometers for the parties before national electoral processes. The “new” political actors that appear through decentralization (mayors and governors) have marked a shift in party and electoral politics at the national level. Practically all parties have presented presidential candidates with previous successful experiences in local or regional government, so one might conclude that successful governing on municipal or regional levels constitutes a sort of examination of political leadership validity. The governors have also succeeded, as argued, in creating pressure on the central leadership of their own parties, most visible in the expulsion of Alfaro Ucero from AD before the presidential elections of 1998. This is to be compared with the heyday of partyarchy, with “two well-organized, legitimate, and tightly disciplined political parties that were well-suited for ensuring governability,” whereas after the 1998 elections, Coppedge concludes, “political parties became a significant weakness of the Venezuelan democratic governance.” Or, as many social movement theorists argue, the political society suddenly became crowded with too many weak actors, in contrast to the previous experience of a few strong ones. AD and COPEI were almost eliminated from the political maps. The Chávez government also further accelerated the collapse of these parties by cutting off all public economic support to parties.

Three main empirical periods can be discerned in Venezuelan democratic history since 1958. First is the centralized party-State model concentrated in AD and COPEI, that is, partyarchy. Second is the process of decentralization and political pluralization since 1989. The third period is the Fifth Republic with the Chávez government since 1999, in which traits of a re-centralization of political powers have been apparent. However, these boundaries are not so easily drawn; I have argued that decentralization was obstructed already during the Caldera government. Nonetheless, even though Caldera won in 1993 and Chávez in 1998 and 2000, the strength of

749 Coppedge, 2000: 12.
the advances of decentralization has been apparent in the internal party structures and the party system as a whole. The victory of Caldera in the wake of the Caracazo750 riots and the two coup attempts reflected the population’s dissatisfaction and its will to punish the politicians guilty of the crisis. This disenchantment and tendency towards vengeance on the part of the electorate merits even greater attention in the analyses of the triumphs of Chávez, which also need to take into consideration the Venezuelan populist and caudillismo traditions. Despite his being classified as a centralist political leader, Chávez and Chavismo have recognized decentralization as a system, but in need of modifications, including a suggested withdrawal of power from the governors.

An analysis through the rear-view mirror reveals that the decentralization reforms had semi-suicidal results for the traditional authorities, AD and COPEI, even though they continued to maintain a relatively dominant position during the first years of the decentralized system. It is relevant to recall that the two parties suffered from a pressing credibility crisis, which also contributed to factional divisions within the parties between reformers and conservatives. The factionalism within AD eventually proved to be decisive for the decision-making processes before the decentralization reforms. The decision within AD to promote eventual political decentralization was the result of political manipulations by Carlos Andrés Pérez, who used decentralization to eliminate rivalry and complications and the other faction within the AD party. At the same time, decentralization was considered a compromise with the opposition parties that were demanding political representation on the regional and local levels, not only MAS and Causa R, but also COPEI, which were calculating the probabilities of electoral triumphs on the regional and local political levels. In all this, I am not stating that AD as a unified solid bloc at any time accepted and promoted decentralization.

The powerful presidentialism and the possibility for the chief executive to override the legislative body were more crucial factors in this case. Overall, the rational (and irrational) choices of political actors (party leaders, reformists, factions, etc.) have been decisive for the transformations of the

750 Further, many academics, politicians and ordinary citizens still maintain that without fraudulent electoral behavior and sabotage, Causa R and Velásquez would have won. Causa R might have been the most popular party at the time, and the party enjoyed high media attention and coverage.
party system in the context of decentralization. Still, as has been emphasized, more structural aspects also had affects on the process. Reviewing the three crucial factors behind the collapse or weakening of a party system, we can see that Venezuela suits all three conditions well: enduring social and economic crisis, popular perceptions of the (traditional) parties as incapable of resolving the crisis, and the emergence of an alternative party or leader as an attractive option. The third factor applies both to Velásquez in 1993 and Chávez in 1998 and 2000. The first two factors also functioned as a source of pressure for reform.

To understand the decline of AD-COPEI partyarchy and the eventual collapse of the traditional Venezuelan political system, it is important to follow the gradual changes from the 1980’s. The deepening economic crisis without doubt debilitated these parties and their capacity to satisfy sectorial interests. As stated in the introductory chapter of this study, decentralization was introduced in the Latin American countries in the midst of economic decline and crisis. So, in many cases a causal relationship between economic crisis and decentralization can be perceived. Various scholars argue that the Venezuelan political society experienced a deepening crisis of party identification between 1984 and 1994. The period following 1989 also indicates the preference for a new kind of leadership, with anti-party leaders such as Hugo Chávez, a pattern that goes back to the post-colonial experiences and the caudillismo system. The popular disenchantment was also reflected in the local and regional elections for governors and mayors. The changes related to decentralization and the opening of the political gates to the State and the political system also contributed to the undermining of partyarchy. Decentralization in Venezuela affected political opportunities and openings for all political parties, but in different ways. For the traditionally super-centralized parties AD and COPEI, the changes in internal party structure had already begun in the 1980’s with the development of neighborhood associations, which were flourishing during the decade and contributed to modifications of party stands, especially within AD. Within opposition parties, pressure for decentralization reforms accelerated during the 1980’s.

In all, continuing the line of argumentation on partyarchy, we can definitely see that a great deal has happened since 1989 and decentralization. The party system structure has indeed changed due to the decentralization reform, even though other surrounding developments, such as changes in relationships between interest groups and economic conditions, contributed
to the political climates, the behavior of political actors and the preferences among the population. Even if political party centralization remains as a strong characteristic in many parties, there are more channels for political bottom-up pressure, via the mayors and the governors, for instance. New actors, like the MVR, Proyecto Venezuela/Carabobo, Primero Justicia, Causa R and MAS parties, as well as mayors, governors and junta leaders with weak or no ties to AD and COPEI, have entered the State arena and attained representational status and power. In addition, all of the traditional parties have divided, more or less officially, often through conflicts between decentralizers and centralizers, and the creation of new parties and cross party alliances is now a common feature on the Venezuelan political scene.

The question of whether there are any general differences between parties created before and after decentralization has mainly to do with structural and institutional character. The central leadership of AD and COPEI tried to resist and delay the decentralization reform, although factions and regional bases of both traditional parties promoted the process. MAS, MEP and Causa R had pressured for political opening through decentralization, including the element of party system democratization. The regional and municipal political and electoral movements that were created after 1989 were, so to speak, born within the new structure, and several of these concentrated their struggles in a specific territory, a regional state, for example, as Proyecto Carabobo and Primero Justicia did, which later expanded to the national level. Causa R shares this trait as a regional political movement that through mobilization and struggles went from the micro to the macro political level.

As argued, decentralization brought a deepening of democracy through the opening of the political system with the direct election of local and regional political authorities. One additional objective of the COPRE reforms was the democratization of the political parties. From that reform perspective, the link between decentralization and the transformation of the party system can be seen in an actual purpose of the reform. That is, changing the party structures through political decentralization. The symbolic value of the new leaderships and the consequences derived from decentralization for the legitimacy of the political system is often mentioned as one of the most evident positive results of decentralization. Citizens and organizations have gained better channels for political participation in the public sector. Generally speaking, what might be promising for the future is that practically all the major political actors present themselves as defenders of
decentralization as a political and governmental model. These aspects of the symbolic value and general recognition of decentralization might be its most important achievements and of decisive value for the evolution of the Venezuelan political and party system since 1989. Variations do however exist among parties and politicians about how the divisions of power and economic resources should be distributed. Decentralization has thus contributed to democratic improvements, but also to complications and confusions, with a duplication of bureaucracy and possibilities of clientelistic behavior.

The second governments of Carlos Andrés Pérez (1989-1993) and Rafael Caldera (1994-1998) were characterized by neo-liberal approaches. Pérez did, however, accelerate decentralization during his term, though pressed by the social perceptions of betrayal and disillusion manifested through the Caracazo riots in 1989 and the attempted coups d’État in 1992. Regarding the position of current President Hugo Chávez on decentralization, he opposes the neo-liberal and bureaucratic duplication aspects of decentralization, and centralist traits have been apparent during his first years in power. On the whole, Pérez and interim President Ramón J. Velásquez have to be classified as far more decentralist than Lusinchi, Caldera and Chávez. However, as shown, there are indicators pointing towards decentralization as a possible crucial condition and opportunity structure also for more authoritarian political movements to enter the political sphere. If the historical ties between Chavismo and Causa R are considered again, some further contradictory aspects come to light, since the former rather has entered from the macro-national level and the latter from the local grassroots dimension. However, the grassroots activities of Chavismo since 1994 should not be underestimated.

Returning to the theories of protest cycles within the structures of political opportunities presented by Sidney Tarrow and other social movement theorists, a change in political behavior and political culture is evident from the late 1980’s onwards. The rapid emergence of Causa R in the early 1990’s, as well as the rise of the Chávez movement before the elections of 1998, were both processes in which the main political actors based their approach on an anti-politics and anti-establishment discourse. Both attacked the traditional Venezuelan political systems and parties, thus taking advantage of the general political disenchantment and the opportunities in the decentralized political and electoral system. These two political movements – Causa R and the movement around Chávez (MBR-200 and
MVR) – and also the regional and local leadership of MAS (e.g., Carlos Tablante) have been key actors in protest actions between 1989 and 1998. During the Chávez government, regional state leaders have been in the forefront in manifestations of the Coordinadora Democrática opposition alliance.

Rounding off the book, Chávez did not kill the Venezuelan partyarchy, and neither did Caldera. The old elephants practically committed political suicide in promoting and accepting decentralization as the new set of rules for the political game.
Appendix 1:
Political Party Fragmentation in Venezuela (1997-2001)

The Old Guard of Alfaro Ucero

- **AD**
  - Apertura
  - Renovación
  - Encuentro Nacional

- **COPEI**
  - Faction of Eduardo Fernández
  - Faction of Irene Sáez
  - Convergencia

- **Proyecto Venezuela**
- **Primero Justicia**

- **ARIAS/UNION**

- **MAS**
  - Independents, expelled & regional formations

- **PODEMOS**
- **MVR**
- **PPT**

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751 Lalander, 2000: 42. Convergencia was formed in 1993.
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