



| OPEN AND SIMULTANEOUS PRIMARY ELECTIONS: LATIN AMERICA EXPERIENCES

| ELECCIONES PRIMARIAS ABIERTAS Y SIMULTÁNEAS. EXPERIENCIAS EN AMÉRICA LATINA

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INTRODUCTION

The articles in this Discussion Forum deal with the open and simultaneous presidential primary election systems (PAS by its Spanish acronym) adopted and implemented in several Latin American countries. After the expansion of open primaries to select presidential candidates unilaterally and on a voluntary basis by parties and coalitions (conventional open primaries), the incorporation of this practice into the national electoral legislation has become widespread as a formal and, in some cases, also compulsory instance. Therefore, the PAS system fulfills a double function: on the one hand, it is a mechanism for nominating party/coalition candidates, and on the other hand, it constitutes an electoral rule formally incorporated into the official legislation of the countries, as an instance before the presidential election.

Thus, in Argentina (2009), Bolivia (2018), Colombia (2006), Chile (2012), Honduras (2004), Paraguay (2014), Peru (2019, but eliminated in 2024), the Dominican Republic (2018) and Uruguay (1997), open primaries have been formally established, must be held simultaneously,

are officially regulated and controlled by the country's electoral body and, in many cases, are financed with public funds. These nine countries have passed regulations that present nuances and peculiarities, although they are similar, and were enacted in a coinciding period, which could partly respond to processes of diffusion, fashion, or external agents' pressure.

The expansion of this model raises an initial question about the reasons that led to the increasing adoption of this type of nomination mechanism. In this area, the need to provide greater legitimacy to political parties interacts with various motivations that political actors seek to channel strategically. On the other hand, and despite the convergence in a PAS system, all these countries adopted diverse variants and alternative modalities of application, which can generate different consequences of implementing the system. These differences originate in the alternative ways in which designers sought to maximize the advantages of conventional open primaries and minimize the damages observed with their implementation.

Indeed, until now, academic research on the subject has focused mainly on the study of conventional open primaries, finding both supporters and detractors of using this selection mechanism. According to one stream of literature, open primaries foster the resolution of intra-party conflicts, favor the nomination of candidates with greater eligibility conditions, leaving the determination of public offices in the hands of a broad electorate, and parties that use them benefit in inter-party competition. At the same time, according to the extensive literature that emphasizes the negative consequences of open primaries, this practice carries the risk of nominating less competitive candidates—that is, farther away from the median voter - because the members of the selectorate tend to be ideologically more extreme than those of the general electorate. At the same time, the inherently conflictual nature of a primary contest can be detrimental to the parties in the general election. This, on the one hand, makes it difficult to develop strategies for intra-party collaboration subsequently and, on the other hand, encourages the drain or migration of internal defeated candidates' supporters. Finally, it has been observed the existence of partisans voting in other parties' primaries (crossover voting), which involves strategic voting for the least competitive candidate of the opposing party to have better chances in the general elections. Now, as mentioned above, the widespread adoption of open primaries as an electoral rule is intended, in one way or another, to take advantage of the alleged benefits of unilateral primaries, establishing, at the same time, precautions against potential damages.

Indeed, with open primaries as an electoral regulation, the selectorate is now composed of the entire electorate. Thus, theoretically, the higher the attendance at the primaries, the greater the influence of independents and the greater the probability of electing candidates with broad popular acceptance. For this purpose, in some cases—Argentina and Peru—mandatory citizen voting was established in open primaries, although voluntary voting was stipulated in other cases.

On the other hand, parties/coalitions are forced to run for primary elections in some countries, while they are not in others. In Argentina, Bolivia, Peru, and Uruguay, all parties must appear compulsorily in the primaries to compete in the subsequent elections; in Colombia, Chile, Honduras, Paraguay, and the Dominican Republic, only those political forces that voluntarily decide to do so and have more than one contender for the nomination are allowed to do so.

In turn, to mitigate the negative effects that frequently occur due to internal confrontations and restore harmony between the disputing factions, a sore loser law has been incorporated—which prevents internal losers from participating in the general elections with another party label. More specifically, in some cases, primary losers are integrated into different positions, including their nomination as vice-presidential candidates. However, no such possibility exists in Argentina and Bolivia since presidential primaries, including the vice-presidential candidate, are run with the full ticket.

In this sense, along with the diversity in the rules, there are differences in

the way in which parties and coalitions face the electoral stage. The main difference lies in the decision of the political forces to submit the nomination of the presidential candidate to an open popular vote. Thus, with primaries with voluntary attendance, some parties/coalitions participate in this stage, and others do not, and with mandatory attendance, some political forces decide to present more than one candidate, and others choose to nominate a single candidate. This is a central issue since primaries are established to give broad participation to the citizenry in the candidates' nomination process. Still, their mere existence does not ensure that this will happen. The rules play a crucial role in this matter, generating the appropriate incentives to encourage internal competition. In particular, the situation in which the nomination losers are left and their prospects of continuing in the electoral race seem to play a fundamental role in encouraging competition.

In sum, there is a growing trend in Latin America to promote the legal adoption of a system of presidential primaries held simultaneously and open to the par-

ticipation of the entire electorate. However, PAS systems are in constant dispute, among other things, because it is not evident that they have generated benefits in terms of internal democracy and favored citizen involvement in politics. In some cases, the legislation has been repealed, and in others, it has been suspended, giving rise to a permanent controversy about its convenience and a debate requiring further study. Indeed, there are divergent models of PAS, both in their design and in the way political actors use them, and the impact of this type of rule on parties, electoral competition, and the entire political system is still unclear. The following articles in this forum address the main questions that arise with the PAS system, that is, the motivation to introduce it, the tendency to compete for the nomination, the conditions in which losers are left, and the future perspectives of the system. The accumulated experience should contribute to the debate on the reform of the system where it already exists and on the convenience of its adoption in other countries.

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PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES IN LATIN AMERICA. WHY AND WHAT FOR?

The comparative study of presidential primaries is relatively recent in Latin American literature, despite their widespread incorporation in the region. Although the results of such electoral processes and, in other cases, the consequences derived from them have been explored, there is still more to be analyzed in relation to the

reasons behind the implementation in each case, especially from a Latin American approach. The work of the authors of the current Debate Forum has precisely, as its main contribution to the theory, a detailed analysis of the cases in which presidential primaries have been regulated in the region.

LATIN AMERICA AS AN ELECTORAL BATTLEGROUND

The general theory indicates that primaries are introduced 1) to resolve conflicts within political parties; 2) to nominate those candidates who could have a greater chance of winning the popular vote; 3) to moderate the influence of certain power groups on the designation of candidates, doing so in favor of a broader electoral partisanship base; and 4) in the specific case of Latin America, in addition to the above, the re-legitimization of the party system and the political system themselves could play a special role.

In the Latin American context, democracies face problems ranging from weak links between parties and society to poor governance and a crisis of citizen expectations. Instead of resolving conflicts, institutions can become sources of frustration, promoting contestation movements, polarization, and risks of authoritarian backsliding. Although operational, these institutions face problems such as corruption, inefficiency, and concentration of power in the elites, which disconnect citizens and project an image of injustice or inability to resolve crises. To regain confidence in democracy, it is not enough to hold elections; institutional renewal is required to improve transparency, efficiency, and inclusion. In this context, new electoral rules have been introduced in Latin America, including presidential primaries.

The characteristics of the diverse Latin American electoral systems sometimes do not allow for the classification of the causes of the implementation of prima-

ries solely as processes that tend to the internal democratization of the parties or strengthening of democracy. There are also caudillo-style and authoritarian tendencies that contradict social expectations and generate electoral rules that fall far from democratic ideals. Such particular characteristics are precisely the reason for the enormous differences behind the implementation of presidential primaries in each one of the Latin American systems. Some argued, however, that there are common elements in the region as a result of processes in which diffusion, fashion, or pressure from external instances have operated. This argument becomes especially relevant considering that the insertion of primaries as an *electoral rule* in most Latin American cases comes after verifying the existence of negative consequences within the political parties. Nevertheless, without ignoring the latter factors, it is possible to find somewhat specific and grouping, although never univocal, motivations for implementing presidential primaries as a tool of candidate nomination in the region.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES AS A STRATEGY FOR SETTLING INTERNAL CONFLICTS: URUGUAY AND ARGENTINA

The Uruguayan political system underwent profound modifications through its constitutional reform of 1996. This reform included the nomination of presidential candidates through simultaneous and mandatory internal elections. The strengthening of the parties since

the return to democracy allowed the implementation of an inclusive system of nomination of candidates through primaries that has been applied on a stable and continuous basis. In this way, there was a change from a system of *double simultaneous voting* to an open, simultaneous, and mandatory primary system seeking to settle inter-party conflicts and avoid political forces' fragmentation. In Uruguay, it has been argued that the transition to presidential primaries has been effectively used for presidential candidates to compete with each other, apparently as a result of the inclusion of the losers within their own party ticket and the possibility of these to compete with their own legislative list. Given that a solid political system has motivated the inclusion of presidential primaries for the settlement of internal conflicts, the regulation of primaries has propitiated a high level of intra-party coordination.

In Argentina, political reforms have also had a significant impact. One example is the implementation of the PASO (Open, Simultaneous, and Mandatory Primary Elections) in 2009, which sought to consolidate a more stable and competitive bi-coalitional system. The idea was to democratize the nomination of candidates, generate a more organized electoral process, and strengthen and reunify political forces. However, the bi-coalitional system intended to be strengthened imploded in 2023 with the unexpected victory of an "outsider" as president, challenging the two main coalitions that have dominated Argentine politics. This result highlighted both the limitations of electoral reforms and the fragility of the political system in the face of abrupt changes

in popular will. A doubt was casted on the foundations of a series of assumptions regarding the so-called *virtuous bi-coalitional structure* that dominated Argentine politics between 2015 and 2023.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES WITH THE AIM OF RE-LEGITIMIZING THE PARTY SYSTEM: COLOMBIA, HONDURAS AND CHILE

The Colombian experience has shown a relatively successful internal democratization exercise. In a context of corruption, drug trafficking, opportunist turncoat, and low institutionalization, the nomination of presidential candidates by means of more democratic exercises in the country began with the election of César Gaviria through internal primaries. This was a response to the tireless requests of Luis Carlos Galán, who was assassinated before being able to participate in the primaries. After a series of consecutive reforms with the objective of internal democratization of the parties and the progressive use of this mechanism by more and more political forces, open popular, closed internal, and inter-party consultations for the nomination of candidates were introduced in the constitution. These three mechanisms represent a deliberate tool—whose results are binding—to the political forces and have been considered to be used effectively to improve the internal democratization of both traditional and new parties. It is important to point out that in some cases, the second most-voted candidate in the

primary process has been nominated as a vice-presidential candidate, which could strengthen the political ticket.

The Honduran party system, with a clientelistic and caudillo-style, has enjoyed a certain presumption of stability in spite of its democratic impasses. Precisely, the system's characteristics promoted a crisis that determined the need to seek more democratic mechanisms for the internal nomination of presidential candidates. The objective was to avoid not only party fragmentation but also to curb the authoritarian ambitions of caudillos. Presidential primaries began to materialize early in the 1990s as a result of elite negotiations, showing a positive tendency to deepen these mechanisms. Thus, it can be affirmed that internal party conflicts with different leaderships were the trigger for the implementation of a system of compulsory-only in cases in which there were at least two factions interested in running—and simultaneous primaries. Presidential primaries have become a fundamental part of the political system in the country and have a favorable response from the population in terms of participation.

Another clear example of changes driven by democratic re-legitimization is Chile, a case where we can find political reforms aimed at improving electoral participation and political representation. Among the most prominent reforms since the 2005 constitutional reform—which eliminated several authoritarian enclaves—are the implementation of automatic registration and voluntary voting, the reform of the electoral system that replaced the bi-nominal system inherited from the dictatorship with a

proportional system, and the introduction of primaries to improve transparency and internal party competitiveness. These reforms were interrelated and had a common objective: to address the low electoral participation and the growing disconnection between the citizenry and the political system. At the same time, the introduction of primaries sought to open up competition within the parties, making it more transparent and participatory, in order to attract an “independent” electorate that remained on the margins of traditional politics. The primaries in Chile are formally regulated, optional, and open to all citizens. The link between these reforms lies in their intention to reverse the sustained drop in participation and to recover citizen trust in the party system.

THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES TO MEET HYPER-PERSONALIZED EXPECTATIONS: BOLIVIA AND PERU

The Bolivian case, on the other hand, shows a dramatic escape attempt in the face of the loss of legitimacy of the incumbent president and vice-president that was ruling for three consecutive terms despite the fact that the Constitution set the limit at two consecutive administrations. The gradual attempts at internal democratization since 1990 were unsuccessful. They showed that, despite the relative institutionalization of the parties until 2003, the opening of the nomination mechanisms to a wider electorate ended up damaging both the parties and their leaders. The

breakdown of the party system in 2005 paved the way for the emergence of a hegemonic party and the systematic expulsion of parties. The implementation of a system of simultaneous and mandatory presidential primaries was not seen as a priority to be included in the electoral rules, given the fragility of the opposition, but also in view of the fact that the majority of the population virtually supported the ruling party. However, in view of the failed attempt to make the possibility of indefinite reelection through a popular referendum, the presidential primaries were inserted to legitimize the nomination of the ruling party presidential ticket. This situation explains the reasons for the easy suspension of their use after a single experience in 2019.

The Peruvian case is probably the most unsuccessful of all in relation to the impossibility of implementing a candidate nomination system through presidential primaries. In 2019, the Congress approved the law that incorporated the open, simultaneous and mandatory primaries. The objective put forward by the proponents for its introduction in the Peruvian case was to foster the strengthening and stability of political forces in particular and to generate greater legitimacy for the system in general. However, it has been argued that its main task was to increase the favorability of the incumbent president, that is, seeking to benefit directly from this process. The legislation was never enforced and ended up being repealed in 2023. The hyper-personalized system, the great fragmentation of parties, the structural weakness, and the lack of institutionalism did not generate the right

conditions for the effectiveness of such a regulation in the Peruvian context.

A BRIEF GENERAL ANALYSIS BY WAY OF CONCLUSION

The Latin American cases studied show different reasons behind the implementation of presidential primaries within their political systems. However, it is possible to outline three trends that have motivated their inclusion as a result of the particular and diverse connotations of the region: as a strategy to 1) settle internal conflicts; 2) re-legitimize the party and political systems; and 3) to satisfy hyper-personalized expectations.

Thus, in the Uruguayan and Argentine cases, the existence of institutionalized political systems have motivated and have propitiated an inclusive regulation for presidential primaries that allows both the internal democratization of the parties and the resolution of their intra-party conflicts. However, it must be recognized that although both models have been solid and continuous over time, in the case of Argentina, the limitations and problems of the mandatory and simultaneous nature of the presidential primaries have been deepened and exposed.

In countries like Honduras, Colombia, and Chile, the introduction of presidential primaries has responded to the need to re-legitimize political systems weakened by a representation crisis and low electoral participation. In Honduras and Colombia, such an introduction particularly responded to massive corruption that has further eroded trust in institutions, which generated a stronger

demand for transparency in candidate nomination. Presidential primaries were intended to help rebuild the relationship between parties and the public.

Finally, Bolivia and Peru introduced presidential primary systems with the main objective of legitimizing and/or favoring the incumbent. This has generated a disconnect between the partialized regulation and its practical application. This characteristic largely explains the propensity to eliminate them from the system.

In contemporary democracies, the maintenance of formal procedural features, such as presidential primaries, is often subordinated to structures that

can progressively erode the quality of these processes, giving rise to deficits in democratic procedures. In all cases, it is necessary to emphasize that, although essential, political reforms in themselves do not ensure stable and effective democracy. It is crucial that these procedures are continuously adapted to new social demands in order to respond to changes in society and ensure that the reform agenda remains relevant and effective while generating stability and robustness of the democratic system over time.

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WHAT HAPPENS TO THE LOSERS? REWARDS AND RESTRICTIONS FOR LOSERS OF PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES IN LATIN AMERICA

Analyses of primary elections usually highlight the role of those who win the candidacy within political parties and on the selection mechanisms or processes. These two aspects cover much of the subject's interest. However, an under-explored aspect is what happens to the losing candidates, their role in the consolidation of the official candidacy and stability of the political organization, or, on the contrary, the fracture of the party and the weakness of the candidacy after the primary process.

The term 'primary losers' can encompass a variety of phenomena, including demobilisation of supporters, fragmentation of support within the party, and, in some cases, deep divisions that affect the party's chances in the general election. In this discussion, we examine how los-

ing candidates behave, how their defeat is managed within parties, and how it impacts the overall electoral outcome. In addition, we explore the role that specific features of the political system and the type of primaries play in the management of these losers.

The analysis will be structured as follows: first, existing knowledge on the subject is briefly reviewed, emphasising studies highlighting the management of losers in primaries to maintain internal party cohesion. Secondly, the different scenarios that seek to secure the support of losing candidates for the winning candidate will be presented. A third section will analyse the impact of primary losers on electoral dynamics, and finally, some brief conclusions will be outlined.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT THE MANAGEMENT OF THE LOSERS IN PRIMARIES?

The selection of candidates for election is a key function of political parties. Many scholars believe this is their most important task. This process generates great interest, not only because all organisations seek to put forward the best candidates to ensure electoral victories but also because, as it is an internal competition, parties ideally avoid fracturing after selection. It is essential that unsuccessful candidates continue to support the party and endorse the nominees, thus allowing them to compete in the general election as a unified entity. While this would be the ideal scenario, the literature points out that the selection process most commonly involves a high risk of internal divisions between those who are nominated and those who are not.

Unlike most studies on primaries that focus on the processes, selection mechanisms, and profiles of the candidates who win the nomination (winners), as well as their behaviour once elected, this analysis focuses on those who lose in the internal competition (losers) and the effects that this entails, and on how some political organisations or electoral regulations have managed to deal with the challenges of those who lose a primary election.

First, it is important to consider some particularities of the party and electoral systems in certain Latin American countries. Not all countries have open, compulsory, and simultaneous primary elections. For example, Argentina and Peru (although the latter never implemented the reform on primary elections) make

voting compulsory for the general electorate. On the other hand, regulations in Bolivia and Uruguay require political parties to hold primary elections to select their candidates. In Colombia, Chile, and Honduras, parties themselves decide whether or not to use this mechanism to select their candidates. In Honduras, parties are exempt from participating in primaries if they only have one candidate.

In the specialised literature that has addressed open primaries as a mechanism for nominating candidates, some consider this method to be beneficial for party functioning. In contrast, others see it as inappropriate or even detrimental to the representative relationship. For the former, open primaries legitimise elected candidates, reduce the influence of party structures, and encourage openness and transparency of parties in the eyes of citizens, who tend to reward those who follow democratic procedures.

However, those who believe primaries highlight internal tensions within political organisations argue that they can harm parties in the general election due to their conflictive nature. In this sense, it is argued that competitive primaries can lead to negative and wearing campaigns between those competing within a party, questioning the organisation itself, which hinders the development of intra-party collaboration strategies and encourages the flight of adherents from defeated sectors. They also argue that these elections diminish candidates' party loyalty, as their source of legitimacy lies outside the party.

In other words, if the choice of candidate shifts from reliance on a party elite to the party membership, internal relations may be affected by the presence of conflict-

ing power groups, the formation of factions and disloyalty to the hierarchy, and even the disruption of levels of internal cohesion and discipline. Moreover, by relying on the support of a broader constituency rather than the party elite, candidates may develop loyalties that do not necessarily align with the party's long-term interests.

On the other hand, one of the biggest risks of primaries is internal party fragmentation, which arises when ideological or personal differences between candidates deepen rather than being resolved after the contest. This fragmentation can weaken the party, affecting both its electoral performance and its ability to govern effectively. In some cases, losers choose to launch independent candidacies, further fragmenting their supporters' votes and benefiting rival parties. In other cases, the division is less visible but equally damaging, manifesting itself in a lack of cooperation between internal factions.

Fragmentation can also damage the party's public perception, generating distrust among voters about its ability to govern coherently, especially in political or economic crises. While primaries are not always the direct cause of these divisions, they can act as a catalyst that exacerbates existing tensions.

Management of losers in primaries is thus a central aspect of ensuring the cohesion of the party organisation. After defeat, candidates who fail to win the nomination face the choice of supporting the winner or challenging their leadership directly or indirectly. In systems where party discipline is strong, losers are often encouraged to join the winner's team in order to present a united front to the general electorate. However, this does not

always happen automatically or peacefully. Tensions between party factions can hinder the process, sometimes diminishing the party's ability to mobilise voters in general elections.

The role of party leadership is also critical in this process. Party organisations with strong leadership and centralised structures tend to be better able to handle internal defeats without serious ruptures. By contrast, in more decentralised parties, where factions have greater autonomy, it may be harder to integrate those who lose the primary effectively. Moreover, the material and political incentives offered to the losers, such as positions in the administration or key party positions, also play a role in their willingness to support the winner.

Another important factor is how the losers perceive their defeat. Those who feel that the process was fair, transparent, and followed clear rules are more likely to accept the outcome and work for the party's benefit. Conversely, if they perceive injustice, fraud, favouritism or unclear rules, losers may challenge the legitimacy of the process, undermining party unity. Therefore, the party's ability to offer a narrative of unity and heal internal wounds is critical to its subsequent success.

SCENARIOS FOR LOSERS. REWARDS AND RESTRICTIONS

The scenarios of primary elections can be diverse. We speak of competition when primaries are held to resolve an internal dispute between at least two candidates, but this does not always guarantee competitiveness—that is, that there are two

candidates with a real chance of winning. In specialised academic works, it is suggested that competitiveness be measured on the basis of the margin of victory between candidates (for example, when the winner does not double the percentage of votes obtained by the runner-up, we consider the election to have been competitive). In a close primary election scenario, i.e., those close elections where the person who wins the nomination is narrowly ahead of their main contender, there is a risk of a party split if the runner-up discredits the process in an attempt to win the nomination. In such cases, if there is a regulation that prohibits leaving the party, the second-placed candidate may be able to bargain for compensation to ensure their support for the nominee in the general election. Otherwise, the party's vote may be affected. However, where there is no party discipline rule and leaving the party is allowed, the candidate who lost the nomination is likely to seek alternative ways to run, either by joining another party or by running as an independent candidate, which may end up splitting the vote and weakening party unity.

When the election is unbalanced, with one leader taking the largest share of the vote in a primary and the other contenders not coming close to their vote (i.e., there is no competitiveness), there is less incentive to leave the party and not collaborate with whoever won the inter-party election.

The question arises: what happens to losing candidates in a primary election? The golden rule of primaries is that the winner takes over the candidacy of the political organisation in the general election,

while those who lose support the winner. This process helps to maintain party unity and discipline, especially when party identity remains an important factor of cohesion and the main channel of political representation. However, in contexts where party prestige is in decline, trust in party organisations is low, and levels of political personalism are rising, leaders tend to use party emblems but show little loyalty to the organisation.

In order to reduce the negative effects of internal conflicts and restore harmony between contending parties, several countries have opted to incorporate the 'sore loser' clause. Moreover, in some cases, it has been decided to include primary losers in the presidential ticket as vice-presidential candidates or in prominent decision-making positions, should they win the general election and form a government. The regulation has a three-fold effect: "retaining" primary losers within party groupings, providing compensation to "content" the best-placed loser through power quotas, and preventing party fragmentation. In any case, even when regulations are in place to avoid double militancy or switching parties, it is common for losing candidates to neither endorse nor call on their voters to support the party's official candidate.

It is also worth noting that the lock clause prevents candidates from changing political forces between the primaries and the general election but does not prevent them from migrating from their organisation once the entire election process has taken place, nor does it guarantee the subsequent recomposition of internal cohesion. For example, Argentine legislation does not require the continuity of

alliances beyond 60 days after the general election. This results in the formation of transitory alliances created to compete in elections rather than providing incentives to advance in the elaboration of a common coalition statute with a perspective of continuity in the medium and long term. Thus, the result is the primacy of electoral coalitions rather than programmatic coalitions (which have an elementary degree of cohesion and homogeneity).

The primary system as a mechanism of internal democracy to select presidential candidates has incorporated the sore loser law in seven of the eight countries in which open and simultaneous primaries are held to select presidential candidates (Argentina, Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Honduras, Paraguay and Uruguay), in order to promote intra-party cohesion. The Dominican Republic is the only country that does not include this tool in its regulations.

The integration of losing candidates into roles such as the vice presidency or government positions has proven to be a politically effective and well-appreciated strategy. This practice allows the preferences of all supporters of the political grouping to be reflected. Moreover, it not only keeps candidates within the party, but also strengthens internal cohesion and prevents fragmentation. Integrating the candidate who came second into the presidential ticket turns the candidacy into a synthesis proposal, which has the potential acceptance of the party *demos* as a whole by including different internal factions. Likewise, guaranteeing the incorporation of the losers into positions of power reduces the cost of defeat for those sectors with greater influence within the coalition.

IMPACT OF PRIMARY LOSERS ON ELECTORAL DYNAMICS

When comparing the vote in the primary election with the general election, a number of scenarios can arise:

- a) The candidacy derived from a primary election may increase the individual vote and the primary vote in the general election. This is the best-case scenario and may indicate that those who lost the primary maintained their support and party discipline for the winner and overcame their first vote.
- b) A primary candidate may retain their primary vote in the general election, i.e., the winner is left competing alone in the inter-party contest, because the primary loser did not go on to support the winner.

The overall electoral context and electorate dynamics also influence how primary losers and political organisations handle their defeat. In a highly competitive environment, where the threat of losing the general election is real, losers may be more inclined to join the winner in a common effort. In contrast, in contexts where the dominant party has a considerable advantage, losers may feel less pressure to cooperate, which could generate internal divisions that negatively impact the party in the general election.

The way primary defeat is handled directly impacts subsequent electoral dynamics. When primary losers do not integrate effectively, the party can face significant problems in voter mobilisation, especially if the loser's supporters decide not to support the winner or demobilise completely. This demobilisation can be particularly dangerous in close elections,

where even a small reduction in turnout can mean the difference between victory and defeat.

Primary losers can also play an active role in undermining the winner's candidacy. This may occur explicitly, through the creation of independent candidacies or the promotion of a critical discourse against the party's nominee, or more subtly, through the refusal to mobilise resources and support. In some cases, losers may even encourage their supporters to vote for a candidate from another party, generating a phenomenon known as "crossover voting", thus weakening the party's electoral position as a whole.

In some circumstances, losers can play a positive role in building a narrative of unity. By effectively integrating themselves into the winner's campaign, they can help broaden the party's support base and attract voters who might have felt alienated. This is particularly true in contexts where the winner needs to forge broader alliances to succeed in the general election. In these cases, cooperation between the winner and loser can strengthen the party's ability to present itself as a more inclusive and unified option.

However, it is important to note that the impact of primary losers is not limited to the short term. In some cases, the way their defeat is handled can have long-term consequences for party structure and cohesion. If internal tensions are not adequately resolved, they can lead to the creation of more formalised factions within the party or, in extreme cases, to the break-up of the party into different groups. The management of losers in primaries is, therefore, not only

a question of immediate electoral success but also of long-term organisational stability.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The handling of losers in primaries is a complex issue that has profound implications for both the party and the democratic system in general. The ability of parties to effectively integrate losers can be the difference between electoral success and failure. Losers who integrate and support the winner can help strengthen party unity and increase their chances in general elections. Conversely, losers who do not integrate can create divisions that negatively affect the party in both the short and long term.

Moreover, the management of losers in primaries impacts not only immediate electoral success, but also long-term organisational stability. Parties that fail to manage internal tensions that arise during primaries adequately run the risk of fragmentation, which can weaken their ability to compete effectively in future elections. It is, therefore, essential that parties develop effective strategies to manage internal defeats and prevent fragmentation.

As we have seen, several Latin American countries have an open primary system for selecting presidential candidates, each with its own particularities. These systems are often the subject of debate and questioning, especially when analysing their impact on both internal party democracy and the political representation system in general. This paper has focused on what happens to candidates

who lose internal competitions, an aspect that is not usually at the centre of the debate when analysing candidate selection processes within political organisations and primaries. In this analysis, the emphasis has been on an overview of the rewards and constraints faced by primary losers in Latin America. Therefore, for future research, a more in-depth and comparative analysis that considers the particularities of each country would be necessary.

Ultimately, how losers are handled in primaries reflects the overall health of the

democratic system. The open primary system is a key tool for candidate selection, but it is also a space where parties' capacities to manage internal conflict constructively are tested. Parties that succeed in doing so demonstrate their ability to adapt and thrive in a competitive political environment, which strengthens not only their electoral position, but also the democratic system as a whole.

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“AND YET IT MOVES”: NON-MANDATORY INTERNAL OR INTERPARTY PRESIDENTIAL PRIMARIES IN LATIN AMERICA

Presidential offices in Latin America are among the most significant electoral positions, making them the main objectives for parties and candidates. Deciding whether to use primaries for selecting presidential candidates is a critical choice within political parties, though the effectiveness of primaries remains debated. There is no consensus on their benefits or risks, and early research, largely focused on U.S. presidential primaries, often overlooked the nuances of multiparty systems or those with runoff elections.

More recent literature has created an interpretative framework for presidential primaries in Latin America, although the debate over their advantages remains open. The use of these mechanisms can expose internal conflicts within social organizations or produce positive effects on party militancy amidst declining party support. Additionally, it may generate a

“democratic bonus” compared to parties that do not use them.

In Latin America, there are three systems for selecting candidates: those that mandate the use of primaries, whether simultaneous or not, and with or without escape clauses; countries that suggest using primaries but do not require them; and those that do not regulate selection methods. Countries where political organizations are not obliged to use primaries include Colombia, Chile, Costa Rica, Paraguay, and Venezuela.

Our analysis focuses on these systems, excluding Venezuela due to the democratic regression it has experienced. This selection seeks to answer the question: Why do some political organizations use primaries to select their presidential candidates, while others do not? To answer this, we developed a database on the parties and coalitions competing in

these systems' most recent presidential elections.

The electoral systems of the reviewed cases are highly varied: except for Paraguay, which uses a plurality voting system, the others use a runoff system. Colombia and Paraguay do not allow presidential reelection, while non-consecutive reelection is permitted in Chile and Costa Rica. In Chile and Costa Rica, national elections are concurrent; in Paraguay, both national and subnational elections occur concurrently; and in Colombia, the presidential election is not concurrent. Lastly, in terms of voting type, only Paraguay has mandatory voting. Across Latin America, few political forces chose to hold primaries, with Colombia as a notable exception; three major coalitions—Pacto Histórico, Equipo por Colombia, and Centro Esperanza—selected their presidential candidates through primaries on March 13, 2022. In contrast, Chile held primaries for only two main coalitions, Chile Vamos and Apruebo Dignidad, on July 18, 2021, while five other groups adopted alternative selection methods. Of the 25 parties vying for the presidency in Costa Rica, only Partido Acción Ciudadana, Partido Liberación Nacional, and Partido Unidad Social Cristiana adopted primaries. Likewise, among Paraguay's 13 competing political forces, only Partido Colorado and Concertación Nacional held simultaneous primaries on December 18, 2022.

WHAT FACTORS CAN INFLUENCE A PARTY TO USE PRIMARIES?

Multiple factors influence the decision to adopt or forgo primaries as a selection

mechanism. External factors include emulating competitor strategies, enhancing legitimacy, responding to international pressure, or operating within majoritarian systems. Internal dynamics, such as factional conflicts, party ideology, organizational age, and membership size, also play a role. The literature often highlights a greater tendency for primaries among left-leaning, historic, or minority organizations. Such explanations, however, necessitate contextual analysis rather than broad generalization.

OVERVIEW OF NON-MANDATORY PRIMARIES

Of the organizations observed in the most recent presidential elections, 82% were political parties, and 18% were coalitions. Across both types, 20% employed primaries, while the remaining 80% used alternative candidate selection mechanisms. Among those using primaries, 60% were coalitions, and 40% were political parties, suggesting that primaries primarily served as a cross-party candidate selection process rather than internal processes within single parties. Notably, only 10% of political parties used internal primaries to select their candidates.

These findings indicate that coalitions relied more heavily on primaries as a selection mechanism, whereas single parties tended to avoid this approach. The literature supports this trend, noting that internal primaries within parties can expose factional divisions, while coalitions generally reflect a negotiated balance of power in pursuit of collective objectives.

Regarding candidate participation, the average number of candidates per primary was four, with a range between two and six, all involving coalitions. Ideologically, organizations were distributed as follows: 24% were center-right or right-leaning, 17% were center-left or left-leaning, and 8% were centrist. Primaries were most common among center-left organizations (40%) and centrist groups (25%), even though center-left and centrist organizations constituted only 10% and 16% of the total, respectively.

The majority of observed organizations occupied ideological extremes, with 31% identified as extreme-right and 24% as extreme-left. Among right-leaning groups, 20% used primaries, while 17% of left-leaning groups did so. Center-right organizations showed the lowest adoption rate of primaries at 11%.

ELECTORAL PERFORMANCE AND “DEMOCRATIC BONUS”

One incentive for adopting open primaries, where the electorate selects candidates, is the potential selection effect—primaries may help nominate higher-quality candidates with stronger prospects for the general election. Since primaries occur shortly before presidential elections, their connection to the general election is clear, making it relevant to analyze first-round votes of organizations that used or avoided primaries.

Comparing average results from general elections reveals a differentiated impact on outcomes for parties and coalitions depending on whether they used primaries. Chile’s primary-using groups

secured 61.4% of total first-round votes, while those without primaries obtained 38.62%. Parties using primaries averaged 19.31% of the vote share, compared to 12.28% for non-primary users. Colombia’s primary-utilizing parties captured 68.46% of first-round votes, with the only group not using primaries receiving 28.18%, and an average vote share of 22.82% among primary users. Costa Rica’s primary-holding parties garnered 40.34% of valid first-round votes, while non-primary users gained around 55%, averaging 13.4% of the vote compared to 7.87% for non-users. Paraguay followed a similar pattern: primary-using parties won 70.02% of valid votes, while those not employing primaries obtained only 27.03%, with primary users averaging 35.1% compared to 2.45% for non-users.

These findings suggest that primaries enhance electoral performance by consolidating internal support and bolstering candidate legitimacy, leading to a ‘democratic bonus’ that boosts general election success. Electoral results support this trend: most organizations using primaries improved their first-round outcomes, though some variation exists. In Chile, Apruebo Dignidad slightly increased its vote share by 3.64%, while Chile Vamos declined by 33.15%, likely due to right-wing vote fragmentation. Colombian coalitions using primaries significantly increased their vote shares, although Centro Esperanza saw a 59% drop, possibly due to internal divisions. In Costa Rica, PLN and PUSC registered substantial gains, whereas the ruling PAC declined by 16.42%. Paraguay’s Concertación Nacional and Partido Colorado also improved their results.

Of the ten primaries conducted, three involved ruling parties: Chile Vamos (Chile), Partido Acción Ciudadana (Costa Rica), and Partido Colorado (Paraguay). The remaining coalitions included opposition groups or former members of government coalitions but excluded core ruling parties. For instance, Colombia's minor government allies (Partido Conservador, Partido MIRA, and Partido Colombia Justa Libres) participated in primaries, while the principal ruling party, Centro Democrático, abstained.

An analysis of the winners shows that Paraguay's incumbent party, Partido Colorado, was the only ruling party in the sample to conduct internal primaries and retain presidential power. In contrast, other successful groups that participated in interparty primaries were either opposition parties or ruling parties running as part of coalitions that also used interparty primaries.

In the latest electoral cycle, three of four elected presidents were nominated

through primaries: Gustavo Petro in Colombia (2022) and Gabriel Boric in Chile (2022) through interparty primaries, and Santiago Peña in Paraguay (2023) via internal party primaries. Only Rodrigo Chaves Alvarado in Costa Rica (2022) won the presidency without a primary nomination.

These data indicate that primaries have emerged among the studied electoral systems as the primary pathway to the presidency. Their use was more frequent among coalitions than individual parties and particularly prominent within center-left organizations. Consequently, primaries have become essential for nominating presidential candidates in Latin America's open, simultaneous, and voluntary primary systems. They offer political organizations a strategic tool to enhance mobilization and legitimacy, ultimately strengthening their electoral prospects

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DYNAMICS OF CHANGE IN OPEN SIMULTANEOUS PRIMARIES IN LATIN AMERICA: LESSONS FROM ARGENTINA, PARAGUAY, AND PERU

Open Simultaneous Primaries emerged in Latin America as a tool to democratize political parties, broaden citizen participation, and structure the electoral options. This mechanism, allowing citizens to vote in the candidate selection within parties or coalitions, was intended to address issues of representation and transparency in political systems with traditional or fragmented parties. However,

the implementation of open primaries has followed distinct paths in each country, revealing both its potential and limitations.

Argentina, Paraguay, and Peru offer different approaches and outcomes in implementing and modifying Open Simultaneous Primaries systems (PAS, by its initials in Spanish). While Argentina has become a case of ongoing debate with

proposed but unimplemented changes, Paraguay presents a unique case of application within a stable party system with closed, controlled internal competition, and Peru illustrates challenges in applying this system amid high political volatility through a series of reforms and counter-reforms. This article examines the experiences and changes in these three countries, analyzing the achievements, challenges, and limitations of PAS in Latin America.

ARGENTINA: CRITICISM AND DEBATE WITHOUT CHANGE

In Argentina, Open Simultaneous Mandatory Primaries (PASO, by its initials in Spanish) were introduced in 2009 to democratize political parties, structure the electoral options, and grant greater freedom in citizen voting. Since its implementation in 2011, the utility of PASO has been subjected to constant debate, especially given that, in practice, it has failed to foster competition in major electoral categories, limiting its function as a mechanism for selecting candidates and enhancing citizen involvement in the selection process. Despite these results, some analysts highlighted that PASO allowed the consolidation of stable national coalitions, preventing the territorialization of parties. However, the 2023 elections saw significant fractures in this stability, with divergent results between national and subnational elections.

With accumulated experience, PASO's critics began to point to the high costs involved and the lack of genuine

competition, arguing that the system became a "large national poll" rather than a competitive process. In response, proponents suggested adjustments, such as reducing the time between primaries and general elections, allowing optional citizen participation, and redefining the role of PASO's defeated candidates to make the system more representative and functional.

Despite reform attempts, PASO faced a notable failure in 2023, as major coalitions failed to achieve coherent and solid representation at both national and subnational levels, creating fertile ground for anti-system and far-right candidacies, such as Javier Milei, who won the presidency with a discourse contrary to democratic values. This outcome revealed the structural limitations of PASO, leading its initial proponents to acknowledge its shortcomings and critically evaluate whether the proposed modifications could effectively address the underlying issues. It also raised broader questions about whether the system requires a more comprehensive reassessment of its design and purpose within the Argentine context.

Over the years, experts such as Juan Abal Medina and Alejandro Tullio proposed key adjustments, including shortening the time between primaries and general elections and redefining defeated candidates' roles to enhance internal competitiveness. Nevertheless, these proposals were not implemented, and PASO retained its original design. As suggested by Ariadna Gallo, this highlights the urgency of a structural review to enable open primaries to effectively fulfill their democratizing goals within Argentina's current political landscape.

PERU: BETWEEN RESISTANCE AND SLOW REFORM

In recent decades, Peru has been marked by intense political instability characterized by frequent leadership changes, corruption scandals, and constant social unrest. This context of uncertainty has driven various electoral reforms, including Open Simultaneous Mandatory Primaries (PASO), introduced in 2019 as an innovative proposal to democratize candidate selection and foster greater internal competitiveness within parties. However, PASO's evolution in the Peruvian system has been characterized by repeated suspensions and adjustments, reflecting a reactive strategy rather than a stable structural change.

Inspired by the Argentine model, PASO in Peru was approved in 2019 through Law No. 30998, following a Motion of Confidence presented by then-President Martín Vizcarra. The original proposal aimed to replace the mixed system of internal elections with a standardized, supervised system promoting citizen participation in candidate selection. PASO sought to improve party competitiveness and ensure transparency in candidate selection. Before this reform, nominations were decided through a mixed scheme that allowed open and closed primaries and party-selected delegates, with minimal electoral oversight and low citizen involvement.

Despite its approval, PASO's implementation has been consistently obstructed. In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 crisis, Congress passed Law No. 31.028, effectively suspending PASO for the 2021 general elections. Later, in 2021, a second

suspension under Law No. 31.357 extended this measure to the 2022 subnational elections. These decisions illustrate the tension between reform needs and the exceptional circumstances of the national context. These temporary adjustments highlight how reforms can be vulnerable to suspensions and counter-reforms in a crisis, undermining the consolidation of structural changes.

In 2024, Law No. 31.981 officially eliminated PASO in Peru, replacing it with a hybrid model that allows for open, closed, or delegate-based internal elections. This new system requires a minimum participation threshold of 10% in any of its modalities—a significantly higher requirement than seen in previous elections. Some analysts interpret this rule as a step back in the system's democratic openness, favoring greater party elites' control over candidate selection.

Peru's experience with PASO demonstrates how an attempt at internal democratization can be reversed or limited in scope under political pressures and high institutional volatility. The hybrid model adopted in 2024, combining openness and control elements, represents a compromise solution that, while responding to transparency demands, still raises uncertainty about its effectiveness in promoting genuine internal competition and equitable representation of party factions. Peru's trajectory with open primaries highlights the inherent challenges in implementing sustainable structural reforms within a politically unstable and fragmented institutional environment, where democratizing initiatives face continual risks of partial counter-reforms or

mechanisms reinforcing elite control over candidate selection.

PARAGUAY: EXCEPTIONAL USE OF PAS

In 2022, Paraguay experienced an unusual event in its system of simultaneous primaries. For the first time, independent voters were allowed to participate in the Concertación National's internal elections, an opposition coalition seeking to nominate its presidential candidate to challenge the Colorado Party in the general elections. This openness was an exception in an otherwise closed system where only party affiliates were entitled to vote in primaries. Allowing unaffiliated citizens to participate marked a significant milestone, revealing an attempt to broaden the Concertación's support base and strengthen its competition against Colorado's historical dominance.

However, this change was limited exclusively to the Concertación and did not alter the general primary system in Paraguay, which remains closed at its core. The Concertación's open primaries in 2022 were seen as a one-time experiment tailored to the political context of that period. Facing the hegemony of the Colorado Party, with its robust organizational structure and extensive affiliate base, the Concertación pursued an innovative strategy to attract support beyond its formal ranks, aiming to garner independent voter support and enhance its legitimacy as an alternative to the dominant party.

The exceptional nature of this measure also reflects the political context of 2022,

where the opposition perceived a unique opportunity to challenge the Colorado Party, which has held a dominant position in the country for decades. However, this one-off openness does not represent a structural shift toward open primaries in Paraguay, but rather a tactical choice by the Concertación for a specific electoral scenario. Other parties did not replicate the initiative, and the primary system continues to operate under the closed model where only affiliates decide party candidacies.

HOW ARE SIMULTANEOUS OPEN PRIMARIES CHANGING?

Comparing these three models of simultaneous open primaries shows how change dynamics vary based on the political context and party traditions.

In Argentina, Open Simultaneous Mandatory Primaries (PASO) have been widely debated since their 2011 implementation, maintaining institutional stability but facing criticism over their effectiveness and costs. The PASO system has remained fundamentally unchanged despite structural change proposals, such as reducing election timelines or easing requirements. This case reflects critical stability, where the lack of changes does not imply an absence of discussion but rather a stagnation where necessary reforms fail to be implemented, limiting PASO's adaptability to new demands for democratic participation and effectiveness.

In Peru, the scenario is radically different, with a primary system characterized by institutional resistance to full

implementation and a context of “creative instability” favoring parallel experimentation. Despite institutional resistance, the system has allowed for some experimentation with primary models, from an Argentine-inspired design to a hybrid system combining open, closed, and delegate modalities. This approach reflects conservative yet creative adaptation in a volatile environment where reforms are tested within a flexible regulatory framework. Peru’s experience thus exemplifies how instability can lead to experimentation, though it also introduces the risk of counter-reforms that tend to reinforce elite control over candidate selection.

In Paraguay, in 2022, an exceptional case arose when the Superior Electoral Justice Tribunal authorized independent voters to participate in the Concertación Nacional’s primaries, the opposition coalition seeking to broaden its base against the dominant Colorado Party. This tacti-

cal change responded more to a specific asymmetric competition scenario than to a structural reform toward open primaries. This case illustrates how, in adverse contexts, certain actors can adapt practices without altering the closed primary system, which in Paraguay remains focused on internal control and party cohesion.

Analyzing these types of change in PAS in Latin America reveals that in institutional stability contexts like Paraguay, PAS was introduced exceptionally at the demand of a political bloc. In more volatile settings like Peru, despite approval in 2019, mandatory PAS was never implemented until it ceased to be mandatory in 2024. Finally, in Argentina, despite in-depth studies, PASO’s sustained implementation over time seems to make any significant reform more difficult.

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