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Electoral Reform, Institutional Change, and Party Adaptation in Uruguay

Jeffrey Cason

ABSTRACT

Uruguay's stable, institutionalized party system has undergone substantial changes in recent years, both from the increasing electoral strength of the left and from changes made to the electoral system in 1996. Analyzing the debut of that new system in the 1999 national and 2000 municipal elections, this article concludes that Uruguay is moving from what was a fairly evenly divided three-party system to one in which the longstanding traditional parties will confront, as a bloc, the stronger left. The electoral analysis shows that the bloc dynamic took over whenever elections were close between the left and one of the traditional parties.

In 1999 and 2000, Uruguay held a series of elections that confirmed the continuing importance of three major parties: the Colorados; the National Party, or Blancos; and the leftist Frente Amplio-Encuentro Progresista (Broad Front-Progressive Encounter, FA-EP). These elections confirmed that the Uruguayan party system was one of the most stable, if not the most stable, in Latin America. No important new parties emerged. All three major parties had sizable delegations in the national congress. All three won municipal elections and thus held at least local-level executive power. This general stability stands in stark contrast to many other Latin American party systems that are far less institutionalized.

At the same time, Uruguayan politics has undergone significant change in the last decade, change that is not obvious at first glance. Because of revisions in electoral laws before the most recent elections, the two longstanding traditional parties (the Colorados and the Blancos) practiced much greater cooperation, even though they maintained their independent identities. The traditional parties engineered a constitutional reform in 1996 that they hoped would keep the left from winning the presidency in the 1999 elections, and it succeeded. In the process, it encouraged much greater collaboration between the traditional parties as together they faced the left.

The country is only beginning to feel the changes, and elements of the old system will persist. Nevertheless, a new pattern is emerging: when elections look close and the left may win, the two traditional parties unite to defeat the left. This pattern was clear in the 1999 presidential election and several of the municipal elections of 2000. Given the

strong role of parties in Uruguay, it is likely to appear again during the next electoral cycle in 2004–5.

This is the argument that this article will illustrate. A review of the literature on political parties in Latin America highlights how Uruguay differs from most other cases. Following a brief summary of the Uruguayan political party system since independence, the article focuses on the parties' deep roots. The constitutional reforms adopted in late 1996 had a number of effects on the party system, not all of them intentional. Those effects were apparent in the 1999 presidential and the 2000 municipal elections. The constitutional changes have also had a broader impact on the Uruguayan party system, with implications for future political developments.

THE DILEMMAS OF POLITICAL PARTIES IN LATIN AMERICA

The new institutionalist literature in Latin America has focused heavily on political parties. Much research has been done on the volatility and institutionalization of party systems, and problems with party systems are often blamed for political and economic ills afflicting the region. There is also a general recognition that parties are particularly important, especially in new democracies, where they can play a crucial role in structuring political competition, serving as checks on executive authority, and generally consolidating democracy.

This literature has many nuances, but for the present analysis, several main arguments are relevant. The first is that in the majority of Latin American countries, political party systems suffer from a low level of institutionalization. As Roberts and Wibbels note, there is a “pervasive sense that political representation has become destructured or unhinged, creating a volatile situation in which political identities and organizational loyalties are recomposed from one election to the next” (1999, 575). Examples abound. Venezuela has seen the destruction of its traditional party system (McCoy 1999), while Brazil continues to experience party fragmentation and a significant degree of chaos in its party system (Mainwaring 1999). In Peru's presidential election of 2000, for example, the two candidates competing in the run-off had nothing to do with parties that had developed over decades; independence from traditional party structures was clearly viewed as an asset.

Some countries have managed to preserve old party systems to a greater or lesser degree. Colombia still manages—despite its chaotic political circumstances, complicated by drug trafficking and guerrilla warfare—to maintain a two-party system. Chile and Argentina also uphold old party structures, even though Argentina has seen the rise of new political parties that question old alignments and loyalties and a

general decrease in votes for the two traditional parties, the Radicals and the Peronists (Cabrera 1996).

The literature also generally recognizes that despite some of these trends, it is quite difficult to generalize about Latin American party systems, considering that they vary so much over time and among countries. As Coppedge notes,

Even generalizations about different periods of a country's history are inadequate because the periods of relative homogeneity are usually frustratingly brief, and because a periodization that is useful for describing one characteristic is rarely useful for describing any others. Most Latin American party systems are changing, and changing often, in several dimensions at once, all on staggered timetables. There is often, therefore, considerable uncertainty about what, if anything, is "typical" of the party system in any given country. (1998, 500)

This is not to say that no generalizations can be made about parties in Latin America. Indeed, a useful classificatory scheme is proposed by Mainwaring and Scully (1995), who divide Latin American parties into "institutionalized" and "inchoate" party systems. According to other scholars who analyze parties in Latin America, there is an almost universal consensus that the institutionalized variant is preferable to the inchoate, for obvious reasons.

All analyses of party systems in Latin America, furthermore, make the point that Uruguay is at the institutionalized end of the scale; indeed, it has probably the most institutionalized system in the entire region. The nation has no significant antiparty movements, and voters have remained extraordinarily loyal in their voting patterns. Uruguay's political party structure has remained remarkably stable, with gradual change over time.

This stability is longstanding and deep-rooted. It was particularly evident during the nation's transition to democracy in the early and mid-1980s, as O'Donnell has noted. O'Donnell argues that Uruguay had a very different experience with democracy from other countries in Latin America, most of which experienced what he refers to as "delegative democracy." In contrast to representative democracy, "delegative democracies rest on the premise that whoever wins election to the presidency is thereby entitled to govern as he or she sees fit, constrained only by the hard facts of existing power relations and by a constitutionally limited term of office" (O'Donnell 1999, 164). To make his point that Uruguay is different from most other Latin American cases, O'Donnell notes that after Uruguay's democratic transition, the nation did not adopt an unorthodox economic stabilization program like the stabilization packages implemented, with generally disastrous consequences, in Argentina, Brazil, and Peru. Was it

because [newly elected] President Sanguinetti and his collaborators were wiser or better informed than their Argentinean, Brazilian, and Peruvian counterparts? Probably not. The difference is that Uruguay is a case of *redemocratization*, where Congress went to work effectively as soon as democracy was restored. Facing a strongly institutionalized legislature and a series of constitutional restrictions and historically embedded practices, no Uruguayan president could have gotten away with decreeing a drastic stabilization package. (1999, 168, emphasis in original).

In other words, Uruguayan democracy is much stronger than most others in Latin America, and this strength is related to the party system.

THE URUGUAYAN PARTY SYSTEM

Political parties in Uruguay have a long lineage. The Colorado and Blanco parties both formed in 1836. Thenceforth and into the early twentieth century they fought numerous civil wars, and the Colorados usually won. Even after these periodic conflicts, however, the parties usually made power-sharing arrangements that allowed both to participate in national and local political life. They both controlled the political process, by and large; particularly after the last civil war ended in 1904, these two parties engaged in a great deal of elite cooperation “effectively establish[ing] a grand coalition style of government before partisan conflict reached the point of threatening stability” (Peeler 1998, 49).

Uruguay even experimented with a collegial executive along the lines of the Swiss example. Its political system was much more like the consensual or consociational model outlined by Lijphart (1999) than it was majoritarian (McDonald and Ruhl 1989, 93–96).¹ Given that the two major political parties combined received about 90 percent of the vote in every election until 1971, it was relatively easy for them to cooperate to the exclusion of other minor political actors.

The two-party system began to break down, however, as Uruguayan democracy entered a crisis period in the mid- and late 1960s. The economy was stagnating; the GNP fell by 12 percent between 1956 and 1972 (Buchanan 1995, 217). Political conflict was on the rise, and the left was gaining strength. Indeed, the emergence of a strong leftist challenge in 1971 changed the two-party dynamic. Although the left had had minor electoral success before 1971, the formation that year of the Frente Amplio made it an important electoral force. Table 1 shows the overall trend away from a two-party and toward a three-party system.

The left’s increased electoral weight was accompanied by two other phenomena: rising guerrilla activity by the Tupamaros, a largely urban guerrilla movement inspired by the Cuban revolution; and repression by the police and military. This political conflict culminated in the military

Table 1. National Election Results in Uruguay, 1946–1999
(as percentage of total valid votes cast)

	1946	1950	1954	1958	1962	1966	1971	1984	1989	1994	1999
Colorado Party	47.8	52.6	50.6	40.3	44.5	49.4	40.9	41.2	30.3	32.5	32.8
Blanco Party	41.8	38.5	38.9	49.7	46.5	40.4	40.2	35.0	38.9	31.4	22.3
Frente Amplio	—	—	—	—	—	—	18.3	21.3	21.2	30.8	40.1
Others	10.4	8.8	10.5	10.0	9.0	10.2	0.6	2.5	9.6	5.3	4.8

Note: 1999 results are from the first round of elections, held October 31, which determined parliamentary representation.
Sources: Sotelo Rico 1999, 145; *Búsqueda* 1999.

coup of 1973. Even though the Tupamaros had already been defeated militarily for the most part, the Uruguayan armed forces used the guerrilla threat as an excuse to intervene in politics (Costa Bonino 1995, 238–60).

The military regime, which held power from 1973 to 1985, did not reactivate economic growth and certainly did not eliminate the old party system. Indeed, that system waited in the wings. Gillespie notes,

The parties' survival in suspended animation was made possible by the absence of any military project to displace them. And even had such an effort been undertaken, it is hardly conceivable that they would not have one day revived, simply because they were so central to Uruguay's political culture. (1991, 62)

One of the more remarkable aspects of Uruguay's democratic transition was that it occurred without the traditional parties' elite cooperation. The Blancos did not participate in the negotiations that led to the Naval Club Pact of August 1984, the agreement that led to Uruguay's transition; the cooperation that occurred during the transition was between the Colorados and the left (González 1991, 1995; Gillespie 1991). Once the transition had taken place, however, the old cooperation between the traditional parties reemerged, although it was minimal (González 1995).

Any discussion of the Uruguayan party system must also take into account the parties' fragmented nature. Although the electoral laws have reinforced this fragmentation, all three major parties have long had numerous internally competing factions. Some of the factions are clearly ideological; others are based more on the personal following of particular leaders. Some analysts have even gone so far as to say that the Uruguayan parties are not even parties as these entities are commonly understood. This study follows González (1991) in maintaining that they are clearly identifiable political parties, each with multiple factions. While voters may have loyalties to factions within parties, they are also loyal to the larger entities. This loyalty was evident both before and after the military regime.

What was also evident was that the military regime could not stop the left's growing electoral attractiveness. After the 1994 election, as table 1 shows, Uruguay was as close to a perfect three-party system as could be imagined, and no party had the upper hand (Finch 1995). Thus it became clear to the traditional parties that they would have to cooperate with each another if they were to prevent a left victory in 1999. Consequently, the traditional parties worked together to pass constitutional reforms at the end of 1996 that set the stage for this new level of synergy.

ELECTORAL RULES AND CONSTITUTIONAL REFORMS

Electoral laws can have important influences on the structuring of party systems and election outcomes, as much of the new institutionalist literature has pointed out. The design of electoral systems is frequently seen as leading to bad outcomes for democracy (or at least for party institutionalization), as Mainwaring argues in regard to Brazil (1999, 276–78). Of course, it is also possible that countries get, in effect, the electoral laws that they deserve; that electoral laws are the consequences of societal (or at least elite) preferences, or, as Eckstein and Apter argue, that “perhaps ‘electoral systems only express the deeper determinants of society’” (cited in Sartori 1986, 45).

Although it does not resolve this particular debate, the Uruguayan case illustrates how electoral laws were changed because of elite preferences, and then how the changes had consequences not necessarily anticipated by those who instigated them. Electoral systems have an independent, causal impact when it comes to structuring party competition and electoral outcomes, even if the laws governing them were established with a particular deliberate end in mind. In addition, and crucially, such laws come out of compromises between elite actors with different interests. Uruguay provides an excellent laboratory in which to observe these effects.

Uruguayan electoral rules have been nothing if not unique. They helped to solidify the two-party system once these parties were subject to regular democratic competition after 1918. The system in place up to the 1996 reforms established a number of interesting practices, the most important of which was (and is) the double-simultaneous vote (DSV) system, in which voters in a single election on a single day chose a party, a presidential candidate in each party, and a list of senators and deputies they supported in that party. The parliamentary lists themselves were closed, but each major party had more than one hundred lists by the 1994 election, so the voter faced a rather wide choice (Monestier 1999).

One of the most important effects of this pre-1996 system was that it allowed parties to present multiple candidates for the presidency in the general election. The winner of that election was the candidate with the largest vote total in the party that received a plurality of votes in the presidential election. As a consequence, the eventual presidential winner would not necessarily have won a particularly high percentage of the vote. For example, the 1966 election saw the winning Colorado faction (that of Oscar Gestido and Jorge Pacheco Areco) receive 43.1 percent of the total Colorado vote, which translated into just 21.3 percent of the national vote. In 1971, the result was also problematic: the

winning Colorado faction led by Juan María Bordaberry received 55.7 percent of the Colorado vote and just 22.8 percent of the national vote. In this election, furthermore, the system illustrated one of its particular perversities: one of the Blanco candidates, Wilson Ferreira Aldunate, received more votes (26.4 percent of the national total) than Bordaberry, but because the Blancos barely lost the election, Bordaberry became president (Caetano and Rilla 1994, 333–34).

The pre-1996 system also was characterized by strict proportionality in the distribution of parliamentary seats. In effect, then, the Uruguayan system had both plurality and proportional representation (PR) elements. PR was also in effect within parties: seats were (and are) apportioned to the different party factions based on the proportion of party votes they win. Thus, if the socialist faction wins 20 percent of the votes in the FA-EP, it receives 20 percent of the seats that correspond to the FA-EP.

This system served to hold the parties together for electoral purposes. Despite the PR elements that would tend to encourage the multiplication of parties, each party needed to accumulate enough votes to win a plurality for the presidency. Before 1971, this meant that the winning party would need at least 45 percent of the vote. A presidential hopeful, therefore, would want to have strong competitors in his own party, but not strong enough to overtake him. (No competitive female candidates ran for president while this system existed.)

The electoral system also helped to maintain unity on the left, in contrast to the fragmentation and mediocre electoral showings the left has suffered in many other Latin American countries. Uruguay's left remained united not because of the DSV system that allowed multiple presidential candidates, but because the electoral law made it easy to run in a united fashion. Individual candidates and factions did not have to fight it out for a place on the party list (they could simply form their own list), so unifying in a single party incurred no substantial costs. Because the electoral law also made it possible to win the presidency with only a plurality of the vote, it offered a significant incentive to remain unified, both in the traditional parties and on the left.

It is notable in this regard that when the left did split in two before the 1989 elections, the formation of a new party, *Nuevo Espacio* (New Space), initially seemed to indicate that Uruguay was headed toward a four-party system (González 1995). Subsequent elections and the addition of new, more moderate factions to the FA-EP, however, gradually reduced *Nuevo Espacio* to minor party status. Since the 1999 and 2000 elections it appears to be on the verge of extinction.

Thus Uruguay had (and still has) a particularly explicit form of intra-party preference voting (Katz 1986). Though Katz does not examine the Uruguayan case, what he says clearly applies.

Where preference voting is important, a candidate cannot rely solely on his party for election. Rather, he must at some point distinguish himself from other candidates of the same party in order to compete for preference votes. This requires the development of an independent base of support within, or in addition to, the regular party apparatus. (1986, 101).

Katz goes on to note that this practice undermines party unity. In the Uruguayan case, however, other aspects of the electoral law served to reinforce such unity, particularly the rule that candidates could win the presidency with a plurality of the vote.

Indeed, Uruguay has experienced both centripetal and centrifugal tendencies with its electoral laws. Its old two-party system broke down in the late 1960s, when leftist sectors of the traditional parties, feeling squeezed out of those same traditional parties, joined with longstanding segments of the traditional left to form the Frente Amplio. They could do this—and could stand a chance of winning the presidency—because Uruguayan electoral law contained no run-off provision.

This electoral system, nevertheless, served the traditional parties both before the military coup and for the first two elections after democracy was restored in 1984. But the growing strength of the left led the traditional parties to propose a constitutional reform of the electoral system, which was barely approved in a referendum in late 1996 (Correa Freitas and Vázquez 1997; Semino 1998; Cason 2000). The reform's main goal (from the traditional parties' point of view) was to head off a victory by the left in 1999, which looked increasingly likely (Pereira 1996). To do this, the reform instituted a run-off election for the two highest vote getters in the first round, if no candidate achieved an absolute majority. At the same time, to get the reform passed (constitutional reforms require a plebiscite in Uruguay), the leaders of the traditional parties had to make certain concessions, the most important of which was to eliminate multiple presidential candidates from each party, a longstanding goal of the left, which had always had a single presidential candidate.

In addition, the reform made some changes in elections for the Chamber of Deputies. Previously, lists in a one party could form alliances with one another, creating a *sublema*.² Through this mechanism, lists could combine votes to increase the faction's chances of achieving seats in the Chamber. The reform eliminated the "accumulation" of votes by *sublema* for the Chamber, though not for the Senate.

Finally, the reforms changed the electoral calendar. Before 1999, all elections were held on the same day in November, which had the effect of banning ticket splitting among voters. The reform created four elections in each electoral cycle: primaries to select a presidential candidate for each party in April, legislative and first-round presidential elections in October, the presidential run-off in November (if no candidate achieved

an absolute majority), and municipal elections the following May.

Many aspects of the old electoral system were preserved, however, for the time being. For parliamentary elections, each party could present as many lists as it wanted. This maintained and reinforced the factionalization of the three major parties, since it gave them little incentive to combine forces. In the municipal elections, each party could continue to present up to three candidates for *intendente* of each department, a combination of governor and mayor (more like a mayor in Montevideo, for example, and more like a governor in the interior). This allowed the traditional parties to continue to live with their factions on the local level (the FA-EP still presented only one candidate for each post), and it led to much better performance for the traditional parties (particularly the Blancos) in the 2000 municipal elections.

Parties could continue to function as collections of different factions, even if the traditional parties now had to unite behind a single presidential candidate. Local politics could still revolve around clientelistic politicians who concentrated on local issues. The reforms, however, introduced new dynamics into the political system, as illustrated by the national elections of 1999 and 2000.

THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION OF 1999

With the new electoral calendar, the presidential election of 1999 began much earlier than it had in previous contests. Each party faced a primary in April; for the traditional parties, these contests were particularly close and competitive. In the the Colorados' race, Jorge Batlle defeated Luis Hierro with 55.1 percent of the vote. The candidates represented the two main factions of the Colorado Party, which were relatively evenly matched. After the primary, however, the two rivals united, with Hierro as Batlle's vice presidential candidate.

The Blancos' primary was much more contentious, with former president Luis Alberto Lacalle attempting a comeback. Lacalle represented the party's conservative faction, having presided over the implementation of neoliberal economic policies in Uruguay during his presidency (1990–95). Although some of his government's efforts at market-oriented reforms had been thwarted (Filgueira and Papadópulos 1997), in some ways Lacalle's economic policies were not terribly different from those of Batlle, who was also relatively neoliberal in his economic outlook. In the primary, one opponent, Juan Andrés Ramírez, accused Lacalle of corruption (*El Observador* 1999a), and the campaign was particularly bitter. When Lacalle won, with 48.2 percent of the vote, Ramírez all but withdrew from politics, leaving Lacalle on his own and confirming the damage that the new electoral system could do to the traditional parties, which were unaccustomed to running a single candidate.

For its part, the Frente Amplio had a much less closely fought primary, with former Montevideo *intendente* Tabaré Vázquez squaring off against Danilo Astori. Vázquez, a particularly charismatic politician, was expected to be the left's standard bearer in the 1999 elections, but Astori decided to challenge him from a somewhat more moderate position. The primary campaign was at times bitter, but in the end, Vázquez secured an overwhelming victory with more than 80 percent of the FA vote and went on to face the two traditional party candidates in the October election.

As the traditional parties had feared, the left won the first round in October. Indeed, it won by a rather surprising margin, as noted in table 1 above: 40.1 percent of the vote, to the Colorados' 32.8 and the Blancos' dismal 22.3 percent. One could, indeed, argue that the left performed better than it might have under the previous system. Voters could choose the left, secure in the knowledge (through opinion polls) that it would not win the presidency in the first round. Some who otherwise might not have voted for the left for fear of change therefore chose the FA-EP, so as to send a message to the traditional parties that they were unhappy with the current state of Uruguayan political and economic affairs.

After the first round, Uruguay entered uncharted territory with its presidential run-off, scheduled for late November. For the first time in history, a substantial portion of Uruguayan voters would be obliged to vote for a party they did not want. In a country accustomed to a wide offering of electoral choices through the previous intraparty competition, this was a jolt. In November 1999, voters had just two choices: Batlle and Vázquez.

In the event, the Colorados embarked immediately on a campaign to bring Blanco voters to their side. On election night in October, Colorado flags disappeared, replaced by Uruguayan flags and the slogan "Together for Uruguay, Batlle for President." Just over a week after the October 31 election, the Colorados announced an agreement with the Blancos on a plan of government (which also presumably included a promise of positions in the new government). The directorate of the Blanco Party called on supporters to "accompany with their vote" the Colorado candidate and asked them actively to support Batlle in the run-off election (*El Observador* 1999b). This could not have been easy for the Blanco leaders, given their historical rivalry with the Colorados; while they had cooperated in the past, they had never actually voted for their rival. The run-off system, then, inaugurated a new sort of cooperation between the traditional parties.

The Colorados also waged an aggressive campaign to paint the FA-EP as a party that wanted to raise taxes and lacked a coherent economic plan. The left, somewhat stunned by the attacks, ran a rather mediocre campaign in the second round and was defeated soundly on November 28, 1999, by 46 percent to 54 percent.

The first presidential election under the new electoral system demonstrated several important trends. First, it illustrated that nationwide, the left could now easily receive more votes than either of its competitors. Therefore, if the traditional parties had pushed the constitutional reform to deny victory to the left, they had done so with good reason. If the election had been conducted under the old rules, the left might not have won this first round by such a wide margin (the municipal elections in 2000 seemed to bear this out). The left, nevertheless, was clearly the largest political force in the country.

Second, the presidential election confirmed that the core of the left's strength was in Montevideo, where nearly half of Uruguay's population resides. In the second round, the FA-EP received 56 percent of the vote in the capital but only 38 percent outside of it. Certainly the left had made substantial inroads in the interior, but it was still far behind the traditional parties there. (This weakness in the interior also would be confirmed in the municipal elections the following May.)

Finally, the second round made it clear that the traditional parties could unite when they needed to defeat the left. After the first round, many observers speculated that because the second round would exclude the Blanco Party, the Colorados' traditional rival, many Blanco voters would not be able to bring themselves to vote for a Colorado candidate. These predictions were wrong: more than 80 percent of the Blanco voters in the first round voted for the Colorado candidate in the run-off.³ The historical animosity clearly did not apply when it came to facing the left and the uncertainty that a leftist victory would bring.

THE MUNICIPAL ELECTIONS OF 2000

As with the presidential election, Uruguayan political parties faced a new environment when they began the municipal campaign of 2000. The Blancos were hoping to recover from their disastrous showing the previous year, and indeed, they did show new life. The elections, held on May 14, led to the advent of 13 Blanco *intendentes* and 5 Colorado *intendentes*, while the FA-EP won just the *intendencia* of Montevideo, which it had held since 1990.

These results heartened the traditional parties, especially the Blancos. The Colorados did a bit worse than expected, with the exception of their victory in Canelones, the department that surrounds Montevideo. There the FA-EP had placed its hopes of winning its first *intendencia* in the interior. The FA-EP, however, could take solace in that it won Montevideo by an overwhelming margin and increased its vote total in the capital from that of the presidential elections. Table 2 indicates the general lay of the land.

Table 2. Municipal Election Results in Uruguay, May 2000

	<i>Intendencias</i> won, 1994	<i>Intendencias</i> won, 2000	Net change	Percent of vote, 1994	Percent of vote, October 1999	Percent of vote, May 2000	Change, 1994- May 2000	Change, October 1999- May 2000
Colorado Party	7	5	-2	32.5	32.8	31.5	-1.0	-1.3
Blanco Party	11	13	+2	31.4	22.3	28.0	-3.4	+5.7
Frente Amplio	1	1	0	30.8	40.1	39.1	+8.3	-1.0

Sources: See table 1; Uruguay en la Coyuntura 2000a.

A number of observations emerge from this data. First, the Blancos, despite their drubbing the previous fall, reinforced their position as an important, relatively dominant party outside of Montevideo and Canelones, the two most economically developed and urban departments. They received 48 percent of the vote in the departments outside Montevideo and Canelones (Uruguay en la Coyuntura 2000a), which is why they won 13 of those 17 municipal elections. Yet only 44.3 percent of Uruguayan voters live in these 17 departments. In the two departments that matter most, Montevideo and Canelones, the Blancos performed miserably, garnering 11.7 percent of the vote in Montevideo and 13.3 percent of the vote in Canelones. While it is certainly possible that the Blancos could stage a comeback in future electoral cycles, it looks likely that they will remain in third place on a national level, even though they will probably maintain hegemony in many departments in the interior.

Second, the traditional parties, and particularly the Blancos, benefited from municipal elections that were much more like the old electoral system. Allowed to present up to three candidates for *intendente*, the parties' various factions could compete rather than unite behind a single standard bearer. Because the Blancos no longer had to unite behind Lacalle, they did much better (Waksman 2000). This particular aspect of the electoral law also came in handy for the Colorados in their hard-fought battle in Canelones. The winning Colorado candidate, Tabaré Hackenbruch, received 24.8 percent of the vote, compared to the Frente Amplio's Angel Spinoglio with 40.1 percent. Because Hackenbruch could also count on the 20.2 percent of the vote that had been cast for his Colorado rival (and frequent critic) Sergio Chiesa, Hackenbruch won by a relatively comfortable margin.

The FA-EP, hewing to custom, put up only one candidate in each department, which brought its own problems and led party leaders to begin discussing the possibility of fielding more than one candidate in future elections. This idea, however, was quite controversial (*El Observador* 2000a).⁴ At any rate, the left must live with this municipal electoral structure for the foreseeable future, despite its hopes that this would be the last municipal election with multiple candidacies. As political journalist Marcelo Pereira notes,

Many argued this week that these had been the last departmental elections with multiple candidates for each party, but Article 271 of the Constitution, after the reform of 1996, only says that with a law approved by two-thirds of both of its houses, Congress "could establish that each party will present a single candidate for the municipal *intendencia*." The reader can draw his own conclusions as to the probability that such a law would be approved, given the clear benefits that the *rastrillo* [literally, rake] gave the Blancos and Colorados. (2000, 2)

Table 3. Voting in Montevideo, National and Municipal Elections

	Percent of vote, October 1999	Percent of vote, May 2000	Change between national and municipal elections
Colorado Party	29.8	28.0	-1.8
Blanco Party	12.7	11.7	-1.0
Frente Amplio	51.8	58.4	+6.6

Source: Uruguay en la Coyuntura (2000a; 2000b).

Considering that the Blancos and Colorados together control 55 percent of each house, the likelihood of this reform passing is virtually nil.

The left also appears to be the largest vote getter nationally, by a relatively wide margin. Given the relative stability of Uruguayan voting patterns, this is likely to continue. The left, moreover, is blessed with a demographic advantage: younger and first-time voters are much more likely to support it, while older voters tend to favor the traditional parties. As those older voters decline, the left has a built-in advantage. This relatively high support is a crucial reason why the traditional parties will need to unite to defeat the left.

This point can best be illustrated by voting behavior in key municipal races where the left had a chance to win, considering its vote total in the October 1999 presidential elections. In October 1999, the left won not only Montevideo, as expected, but also pluralities in three other departments: Canelones, Maldonado, and Paysandú. Tables 3, 4, 5, and 6 illustrate the differences between the October 1999 vote and the municipal vote six-and-a-half months later.⁵

The tables show that the Frente Amplio vote stayed relatively steady between the national and municipal elections. While more evidence would be needed to reach a definitive conclusion as to why this occurred, we may hypothesize that Frente Amplio voters are more loyal to their party than Blanco and Colorado voters to theirs, and that Frente Amplio voters have nowhere else to go. Although there are some "floating" voters who might vacillate between the Frente Amplio and the traditional parties, their number appears to be small.

The two traditional parties, by comparison, saw their votes fluctuate significantly between elections. It is much more likely that voters migrated between the two traditional parties than in and out of the Frente Amplio. This was recognized by a key member of the Colorado Party, Vice President Luis Hierro, in a radio interview two days after the municipal election: "If one looks at the figures for the Colorado Party in San José and Cerro Largo [two other departments where the Colorado vote was much lower in 2000 than in 1999], it is clear that Colorado voters resolved to

Table 4. Voting in Canelones Department, National and Municipal Elections

	Percent of vote, October 1999	Percent of vote, May 2000	Change between national and municipal elections
Colorado Party	32.0	45.7	+13.7
Blanco Party	21.1	13.3	-7.9
Frente Amplio	37.8	40.0	+2.2

Sources: Uruguay Total 1999; Uruguay en la Coyuntura 2000a.

Table 5. Voting in Maldonado Department, National and Municipal Elections

	Percent of vote, October 1999	Percent of vote, May 2000	Change between national and municipal elections
Colorado Party	33.8	26.2	-7.6
Blanco Party	22.4	38.3	+15.9
Frente Amplio	34.0	34.7	+0.7

Sources: Uruguay Total 1999; Uruguay en la Coyuntura 2000a.

vote for Blanco candidates in the departmental election" (*El Espectador* 2000). Hierro might also have noted that in Canelones, Blanco voters deserted their party in favor of the Colorados, in some cases at the behest of Blanco political leaders (*El Observador* 2000b).

Indeed, Uruguayans are quite familiar with such strategic voting. The *voto útil* (useful vote, as opposed to a "wasted" vote on a candidate who has no chance of winning [González 1995, 146]) was certainly common in the old electoral system. Its use changed somewhat with the new system, but it was clearly still present. The first round of the 1999 presidential election offered much less incentive to engage in this practice because of the second-round run-off. There was still some incentive to cast a *voto útil* in the parliamentary election, which took place at the same time as the presidential first round, but such votes were primarily cast for a different faction within a party, not a faction in a different party.

In the municipal election, however, the old dynamic was in play, because there was no run-off. What appears to have happened in the municipal elections was a run-off election without a formal run-off. It is possible that this dynamic increased because of the run-off in the presidential election, which accustomed traditional party voters to the idea

Table 6. Voting in Paysandú Department, National and Municipal Elections

	Percent of vote, October 1999	Percent of vote, May 2000	Change between national and municipal elections
Colorado Party	26.2	18.5	-7.7
Blanco Party	24.2	42.8	+18.6
Frente Amplio	39.7	37.8	-1.9

Sources: Uruguay Total 1999; Uruguay en la Coyuntura 2000a.

that a vote outside their party might be necessary. It may also have had an effect on Frente Amplio voters. Frente Amplio senator Enrique Rubio makes the case that strategic voting occurred in the municipal elections even in contests where the two top parties were the traditional parties, and even when the race was between two factions of the same traditional party (Rubio 2000).

Rubio's assertion may be true, given the sophistication of the Uruguayan voter, and it may be that this behavior has become more common recently. Because the 1996 reform separated the municipal from the national elections, voters have been allowed to split tickets for the first time; prior to the most recent cycle of elections, voters had to vote straight party tickets all the way down. The presidential run-off also introduced voters to second-best voting options. While more research (and at least another electoral cycle) will be necessary to judge the ultimate impact of these changes, it is probably safe to say that they have had some impact on voting behavior.

The municipal elections conveyed a number of complicated messages, but they did seem to indicate that Uruguay experienced substantial voter migration between the traditional parties. This is not to say that either of the traditional parties will lose its identity; this would be difficult to imagine in a party system such as Uruguay's. Vice President Hierro's comment on the fate of the Blanco Party is revealing, however.

I think that for the government and the country it is important that the National Party reestablishes its profile, its strength, its dynamism. . . . I want a strong, united, and forceful National Party, because this is good for our coalition and the country. In this sense, to see that they have reestablished themselves in various departments has given me a profound feeling of happiness. (*El Espectador* 2000).

Indeed, without a strong Blanco Party, it will be more difficult for the Colorados to win the next presidential election.

CONCLUSIONS

Uruguay's new electoral system will not eliminate one of the main traditional parties; these parties will continue to maintain their identities, traditions, and symbols. Nor is it easy to imagine them merging anytime soon. Their increased cooperation in their effort to defeat the increasingly powerful left, however, is only in its infancy. It is probably safe to say that before 1999, very few committed Colorado or Blanco voters had ever voted for the other party. Now, however, they have gotten used to the idea of voting for their historical rivals; and having done so once, they could, in all possibility, do it again.

Meanwhile, the left continues to gain strength, and probably will expand its share of the vote in the next electoral cycle, judging by the recent trends presented in this study. Given Uruguay's stable electoral system and long-term tendencies, these recent trends are likely to be confirmed. If so, the longstanding traditional parties will see themselves forced into alliances of convenience whenever the left threatens to win an election. The 2004–5 electoral cycle will be the next important test of this hypothesis. If it proves true, more of Uruguay's elections will be contests between a center-left bloc represented by the Frente Amplio and a center-right bloc represented by a Colorado-Blanco alliance.

NOTES

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1. For more on the distinction between these models, see Lijphart 1999. Although Lijphart does not include Uruguay in this work, if he did, he probably would note that Uruguayan democracy has had significant consociational elements.

2. In Uruguayan electoral law, parties are called *lemas* (literally, motto or slogan); a *sublema* is less inclusive than a *lema* but more so than a list.

3. This number is probably closer to 90 percent, though there is no way to know with absolute certainty. The percentage can be concluded from observing that Vázquez's total increased by roughly 109,000 votes between the first and second rounds. A sizable proportion of those votes probably came from voters of the center-left Nuevo Espacio, which had received 98,000 votes in the first round. Batlle increased his vote total from the first round by 434,000. In the first round, 479,000 Blanco votes had been up for grabs. If we assume (reasonably) that half the Nuevo Espacio votes went for Vázquez and half for Batlle, Batlle would have received roughly 86 percent of the Blanco votes to reach his total. If we assume that more than half the Nuevo Espacio votes went for Vázquez, the Colorado portion of the Blanco vote is even higher.

4. They have not yet decided on their course of action, and there would be significant resistance on the left if they attempted to move in this direction

and thus become even more like a traditional party. While this article has referred only to the Colorados and Blancos as traditional parties, some observers have noted a process of “traditionalization” in the Frente Amplio. See Queirolo (1999) for more on this argument.

5. As the figures show, in the municipal elections the three major parties received a much higher percentage of the total vote (around 99 percent in each department) than they did in the national elections. This is because the only other significant party, Nuevo Espacio, faced an electoral environment that did not reward small parties, as the national elections had; the most important contest, for *intendente*, was a winner-take-all election.

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