

Introduction

1.1 THE PUZZLE: THE SURPRISING RESILIENCE OF CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS

Political movements founded by charismatic leaders are widely considered to be ephemeral. Indeed, scholars argue that the unmediated, deeply emotional bonds linking charismatic leaders to their followers fade quickly after the leaders disappear. For charismatic movements to survive, then, the existing literature claims that followers' emotional attachments must be transformed into indirect ties sustained by evaluations of policies and programs or membership in affiliated social groups (Jowitt 1992, 107; Madsen and Snow 1991, 24; Weber 1922/1978, 246). This process of depersonalization, or "routinization," replaces the leader's personal authority with a party organization capable of coordinating voters' and politicians' complex preferences over the long term (Kitschelt 2000, 847; Weber 1922/1978, 246).

Curiously, however, charismatic movements have proven surprisingly resilient and have retained their personalistic core in countries across the world, including Argentina, Venezuela, Peru, Italy, and Thailand. In Latin America, charismatic movements have become particularly prevalent and enduring. For instance, Argentina's Peronist movement, founded over seventy years ago by Juan Perón, has continued to attract charismatic leaders who reinforce, rather than overcome, the movement's weak institutional structure (Gervasoni 2018, 2; Levitsky 2003, 17). Though younger than Peronism, Hugo Chávez's movement in Venezuela has sustained a surprisingly large base of loyal supporters for over twenty years. Even in the face of deteriorating economic and social conditions since Chávez's death in March 2013, about one-third of Venezuelans continue to express deep, personalistic attachments to Chavismo (Briceño 2015a; GBAO Strategies 2019). In Peru, Alberto Fujimori's paradigm-shifting movement from the 1990s has sustained a larger support base than any

other party (Tanaka 2011, 80). In fact, Fujimori's daughter, Keiko, has tied herself to her father's movement in recent years to gain political support. Consequently, she received 40 percent of the vote in the first round of the 2016 presidential elections – over eighteen points more than the second-place candidate (Dargent and Muñoz 2016, 145). While these movements have developed some party structures, each remains characterized primarily by entrenched personalism and institutional weakness (Dargent and Muñoz 2016; Gervasoni 2018; Levitsky and Zavaleta 2016; Mainwaring 2016, 2018).

This book offers a novel explanation for the emergence and surprising resilience of charismatic political movements and sheds light on the resulting challenges for democracy. Rather than necessarily routinizing, I argue that these movements can endure after the death or disappearance of their founders by sustaining their original personalistic nature. As Chapters 3 and 4 demonstrate, survival is possible because citizens' deep, emotional attachments to charismatic leaders can form a resilient political identity that shapes the citizens' worldview and expectations of future politicians.¹ Thus, new leaders who portray themselves as symbolic reincarnations of the founder can reactivate these attachments, garner support, and restore the movement to power in their own name. Chapter 5 illustrates the mechanisms underlying this process of charismatic reactivation, while Chapter 6 identifies the conditions under which new leaders are most likely to succeed in reviving the movement. Finally, Chapter 7 demonstrates the self-reinforcing nature of this process. The results indicate that charismatic movements can perpetually evade routinization and dominate politics after the founder's departure, repeatedly undermining the development of strong party institutions and compromising citizens' democratic representation.

1.2 THE MAIN ARGUMENT

Scholars of routinization cannot account for the strikingly personalistic trajectory that charismatic movements have taken since the disappearance of their founders. Indeed, the routinization thesis views these movements as resting on two pillars: (1) citizens' fleeting emotional attachments to the founder and (2) the founder's exercise of uninstitutionalized, personalistic authority. According to this view, charismatic movement survival requires both the depersonalization of followers' attachments and the institutionalization of the

¹ In keeping with the literature on political identity and partisanship, I understand citizens' political attachments – their perceived psychological connections to a leader or group – as foundational to their identification with that person or group (Campbell et al. 1960; Conover 1984; Green, Palmquist, and Schickler 2002; Huddy 2013; Lupu 2013). Throughout the book, when discussing the reactivation of charismatic movements from the followers' perspective, I therefore refer to the terms "attachment" and "identity" interchangeably. I also treat the terms "linkage," "attachment," and "bond" synonymously.

movement. Yet Peronism and Chavismo, the most prominent charismatic movements in Latin America, have persisted while remaining intensely personalistic and plagued by institutional weakness. In both cases, my research shows that followers have continued to express profoundly affective attachments to the founder and to subsequent leaders of the movement. Meanwhile, the programmatic principles guiding each movement remain ambiguous at best and contradictory at worst, participation in movement-affiliated organizations remains low, and leaders routinely tie themselves to the movement's charismatic founder and exercise personalistic authority rather than working through institutional channels. These factors suggest that both Peronism and Chavismo have failed to routinize.

In contrast to existing literature, I therefore contend that charismatic movements can survive by sustaining, rather than discarding, their personalistic core. The reason is that followers' original attachments to the founder are not fleeting, as scholars of routinization would suggest. Rather, these attachments foster the development of a resilient political identity that remains rooted in charismatic bonds and divides society along a cleavage defined by support for (or opposition to) the founder and movement. Consequently, citizens' attachments need not transform into depersonalized partisan linkages when the founder disappears. Instead, the ties can endure in their original personalistic state. In the years after the founder has gone, citizens' charismatic identity can make them long for a leader who is capable of picking up the founder's baton and single-handedly delivering them peace and prosperity. This identity also deepens citizens' suspicions of politicians who do not align themselves with the founder and movement. As I will demonstrate, new leaders who effectively implement two strategies – (1) tying themselves symbolically to the charismatic founder and (2) achieving bold performance to demonstrate their capacity to “rescue” society – can politically reactivate citizens' unmediated and profoundly emotional connections to the movement and thereby garner support as its new standard-bearers.

However, while many successors attempt to replace the founder, few are able to enact the abovementioned strategies and consolidate power. Thus, the new leaders' success is heavily shaped by three conditions. The first condition concerns the way in which successors emerge. Those who are handpicked by the founder for immediate replacement encounter formidable obstacles that severely encumber their attempts to become effective leaders of the movement. Conversely, self-starters who rise on their own – often years after the founder's disappearance – have greater latitude to convince followers that they are worthy of the founder's mantle. Yet while many self-starters attempt to rise to power, most of them also fail. Self-starters are far more likely to be considered true heirs when they fulfill two additional conditions. First, those who seek power during a crisis increase their chances of success because followers' demand for a savior intensifies under difficult, crisis-induced circumstances. In addition to this exogenous condition, self-starters who exercise individual

agency – namely, the willingness and ability to adopt the founder’s charismatic leadership style – appeal directly to the followers and therefore claim the followers’ deeply emotional bonds with the movement for themselves, as righteous heirs of the charismatic founder.

In short, citizens’ profoundly affective attachments to the founder and movement function as a remarkably stable political identity that cleaves society into two groups – followers and opponents – and structures political competition along the lines of charismatic leadership rather than policy “packages” (Lipset and Rokkan 1967, 3). Yet, the successful revival of the movement by new leaders depends on conditions that occur sporadically. Consequently, charismatic movements do not unfold in the linear fashion of conventional parties, gathering programmatic strength and stability over time (Converse 1969). Instead, these movements tend to develop spasmodic trajectories that involve periods with powerful charismatic leadership as well as periods with no leader at all. This is because, similar to the founder, successful self-starters prioritize bold, shortsighted policies and foster symbolic ties to win the followers’ loyalty. While these initiatives earn self-starters popularity at the outset, the inevitable collapse of their audacious programs eventually discredits them. Furthermore, because these personalistic leaders typically loathe sharing power, they hesitate to groom talented successors. Thus, in the wake of self-starters’ rule, charismatic movements experience a leadership vacuum. Sooner or later, however, the ensuing crisis encourages the suffering followers to seek out a more convincing successor to take up their beloved founder’s mantle, causing the cycle of charismatic leadership to repeat.

1.3 THE RELEVANCE AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THIS STUDY

1.3.1 Theoretical Contributions

My investigation of emergence and revival of charismatic movements holds several important theoretical implications. To my knowledge, this analysis is the first to challenge the routinization thesis and offer an alternative explanation for persistent personalism and institutional weakness in countries where charismatic movements have developed. In doing so, the study contributes to the growing literature in political science that reintroduces charisma as a concept worthy of systematic, empirically driven analysis (e.g., Madsen and Snow 1991; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009b, 2011; Pappas 2019). In particular, the investigation empirically captures the relational nature of charisma by combining quantitative, qualitative, and experimental methods to examine both the demand for and supply of charismatic leadership – highlighting the perspectives of followers and leaders, respectively. This pluralistic methodological approach addresses challenges of conceptualization and measurement with which many studies of charisma have struggled.

Second, this study contributes to the literature on political identity and partisanship by shedding new light on a unique yet resilient form of identity that is rooted in charismatic attachments. Because existing research perceives such personalistic bonds to be short-lived, it overlooks their potential to develop into a stable and enduring form of political identification. In contrast, my analysis indicates how charismatic attachments compete with and undermine the development of programmatic and organizational linkages thought to be foundational to conventional forms of partisanship. By overpowering alternative linkage types and sowing deep roots in the leader's narrative of salvation, I show that charismatic attachments can develop into a stable yet deeply personalistic political identity. Although the substantive content of this identity differs from that of programmatic and organizational forms of partisanship, I demonstrate that it shares important characteristics, including the capacity to endure over time and split society based on a cleavage that crystallizes "in" and "out" groups defined by allegiance or aversion to the founder and his mission to transform society (Cyr and Meléndez 2015; Huddy 2013; Lipset and Rokkan 1967; Meléndez and Rovira Kaltwasser 2019; Roberts 2014; Tajfel 1974). By recognizing charismatic attachments as foundational to a specific and enduring type of political identity, this study clarifies the precise ways in which charisma can exert a more lasting influence on political systems than previously thought.

Through its historical analysis, this study also addresses important debates regarding the roles of structure and agency in charismatic politics. In particular, I underscore the crucial importance of structural conditions, such as the presence of an acute crisis, for both the emergence and revival of charismatic movements. While scholars acknowledge crisis as an important factor for the consolidation of charismatic attachments (Madsen and Snow 1991; Merolla and Zechmeister 2009b; Pappas 2019; Weber 1922/1978), I document precisely when and why crisis matters – not only for the solidification of an individual leaders' charismatic authority, but also for the perpetuation of these leaders' movements.

I also acknowledge the important role of leader agency in reviving charismatic movements. Self-starters simply cannot portray themselves as heirs of the founder without generating their own personal appeal – that is, signaling their own charisma. Yet self-starters' agency only goes so far: the leaders are inherently constrained by the preexisting, personalistic structure of the movement. Thus, as I will demonstrate in the case of the unsuccessful presidential candidate Antonio Cafiero in Argentina, even talented self-starters cannot rely on their skill and appeal to fundamentally restructure the movement into a depersonalized, programmatic party. Indeed, a programmatic strategy, even if well executed, will fail to resonate with the followers, who are in search of a savior – not an ordinary representative. Thus, while recognizing the role of agency as important, this study paradoxically stresses structural factors as central to the vitality of charismatic movements.

Next, this book contributes to the growing literature on challenges to democracy by clarifying how charismatic movements encourage authoritarian tendencies in their leaders, undermine citizens' representation, and impede party system development – all of which make democratic regimes vulnerable to illiberal threats. Leaders who draw their legitimacy from charismatic attachments develop authoritarian behaviors to sustain their image of invincibility. For example, they demand unquestioning loyalty from their followers and display intolerance toward critics. This intolerance can manifest itself in various ways, from public haranguing to discriminatory legalism to, occasionally, outright repression (Weyland 2013). Moreover, to prove their heroic capacities, charismatic leaders seek to concentrate their executive power, undermining the institutional checks and balances that are critical to representative democracy. Finally, to minimize challenges to their authority, these leaders surround themselves with personal cronies rather than professional advisers and experienced bureaucrats, which, in turn, fosters nepotism, corruption, and scant political accountability.

In addition to authoritarian leader tendencies, I demonstrate that charismatic movements dilute the quality of citizens' democratic representation. This is because, in their quest to appear heroic, the leaders of these movements introduce bold programs that demonstrate their miraculous image and openly defy “rational, and particularly bureaucratic, authority” (Weber 1922/1978, 244). While such daring reforms may provide benefits at the outset, the leaders' disregard for bureaucratic rules and sustainable practices eventually compromises the welfare and interests of the movement's supporters. Because the leaders' legitimacy rests not on the supporters' “reasoned deliberation,” rather, it rests on deeply affective bonds, the leaders also enjoy far more leeway in their performance than do politicians in programmatic contexts (Urbinati 2019, 119). Further, over time, the volatility in the substance of charismatic leaders' policies generates a programmatically ambiguous party brand (see Lupu 2013). For all of these reasons, citizens cannot be certain what policies they are supporting when they vote for a charismatic leader. Peronist leaders, who are known for their dramatic policy reversals that span the left–right ideological spectrum, exemplify this programmatic volatility and uncertainty (Ostiguy 2009). In short, citizens' democratic representation suffers because they base their support on the personal appeal and immediate impact of each new leader rather than on the substantive consistency and coherence of the leader's policies.

Finally, the emergence and revival of charismatic movements inhibit the development of stable, institutionalized party systems. Each leader who comes to power must overcome institutional limitations and exercise direct authority in order to prove the capacity to fulfill a heroic and transformative mission. Moreover, these leaders' audacious policies, while successful in the short term, contain the kernel of their own collapse. When the collapse finally occurs, the country enters a period of crisis with no leader to guide the way. Rather than

opening a path to routinization, these circumstances make followers crave a new savior to resolve the crisis, perpetuating the cycle of political and economic volatility. Thus, unlike routinization, which suggests that charismatic movements eventually transform into institutionalized parties, my theory of charismatic movement revival indicates that these movements can expose societies to frequent and severe crises, tenacious personalism, and persistent institutional weakness. Argentine history exemplifies these neurotic cycles.

1.3.2 Empirical Contributions

Substantively, Peronism and Chavismo have irrevocably transformed their respective countries. From the rise of Juan Perón in 1946 to the time of writing in 2020, Peronism has dominated the Argentine political system. Until Mauricio Macri's recent presidency (2015–19), only Peronist presidents had managed to complete full terms in office, earning the movement a reputation as the only force capable of governing the country (Mora y Araujo 2011; Ollier 2015). Existing literature suggests that Peronism owes its longevity and power to the fact that it has transformed into an organized and largely depersonalized political party (Levitsky 2003; Loxton and Levitsky 2018). Yet, the movement has remained characterized by intense personalism and profound institutional weakness (Gervasoni 2018; McGuire 2014). In fact, its most successful leaders – Juan Perón, Carlos Menem, and Néstor and Cristina Kirchner – have subordinated the party (and the political system writ-large) to their individual authority, governing based on their bold, nearsighted policies and captivating personal appeal.

In Venezuela, Chavismo has also upended politics and mobilized poor citizens in an unprecedented fashion. Chávez's anointed successor, Nicolás Maduro, has doubled down on his symbolic connection to his beloved predecessor since rising to power in 2013, widely disseminating images of Chávez in public spaces across Venezuela and even constructing a hologram of the founder to walk the streets of Caracas (@VTVcanal8 2016). Simultaneously, Maduro has overseen a devastating crisis and has resorted to brutal authoritarian tactics to remain in power. Maduro's failed leadership has been widely interpreted as evidence of Chavismo's inevitable death (Denis 2015; López Maya 2014). Nevertheless, my research shows that followers, many of whom disavow Maduro as the true son of Chávez, remain profoundly attached to Chavismo, proclaim devout loyalty to Chávez, and express hope that a more capable successor will emerge in the future (see also Briceño 2015a; Morales 2016). Thus, like Peronism, Chavismo challenges the predominant view in the literature that routinization is the only viable path for charismatic movement survival.

This book moves beyond routinization to explore a different explanation for the remarkable persistence of Peronism and Chavismo. Using an array of methodological tools that shed new light on the perspectives of followers and leaders, my research reveals a personalistic mechanism of survival that causes these movements to persist in society while taking power in fits and starts.

On the followers' side, I demonstrate that charismatic attachments endure in a fairly steady fashion. This is due to followers' deep, emotional identification with the movement, which they establish and preserve through personal narratives that glorify the founder as the ultimate savior, reinforce his mission to combat the people's enemies, and promise a more prosperous future. In contrast to the stability of followers' attachments, both the founder and subsequent leaders bring the movement to political predominance in a temporary and intermittent manner. My analysis indicates that these leaders can only consolidate power under favorable conditions, at which point they must exercise individual agency to portray themselves as heroes in their own right – and, in the case of successors, as symbolic reincarnations of the founder. Moreover, successors who effectively claim the founder's mantle can only do so temporarily, as their shortsighted policies eventually collapse and reveal their weaknesses to the followers. While these leaders never fully replace the adored founder, they play a crucial role in perpetuating the movement because they reinvigorate the political relevance of followers' charismatic bonds, incorporate new supporters from different groups, such as from younger generations, and temporarily restore the movement's supreme power.

The spasmodic trajectory highlighted in this study shows how political movements such as Peronism and Chavismo have risen and persisted by sustaining a fundamentally charismatic core, despite having experienced periods without strong leadership, such as under Isabel Perón in Argentina and Nicolás Maduro in Venezuela. Indeed, such leaderless periods are bound to occur when initially successful self-starters have fallen from grace and conditions have not yet aligned for a new leader to pick up the founder's baton. By illustrating how the tumultuous cycle of charismatic leadership unfolds in these movements, my theory better accounts for the ongoing personalism, institutional weakness, and frequent crises that characterize politics in both countries.

1.4 RESEARCH DESIGN

Scholars have hesitated to parse out and examine factors that have caused charismatic movements to persist. After all, defining, operationalizing, and measuring the psychological mechanisms underlying citizens' loyalty to such movements presents unique difficulties. To confront these challenges, I adopt a pluralistic methodological approach that examines the establishment and revival of charismatic movements in terms of demand and supply, focusing on the perspectives of both followers and leaders.

1.4.1 The Demand Side of Charisma: Follower Support for Charismatic Leaders and Movements

On the demand side, I first draw on public opinion data to quantitatively examine the extent to which citizens' charismatic perceptions of the founder

influence their initial attachments to the movement relative to competing factors rooted in evaluations of movement-affiliated programs and participation in relevant social organizations. While existing literature notes the central role of charisma in generating citizens' original bonds to these movements (e.g., Hawkins 2010; Madsen and Snow 1991; Zúquete 2008), it rarely examines the influence of competing linkage mechanisms. I assess these different mechanisms and confirm that the followers' initial attachments to the movement are primarily charismatic rather than programmatic or organizational in nature. Moreover, I demonstrate that these charismatic attachments are more than short-lived ties to the original leader; rather, they develop into a resilient form of political identity with both the leader and his movement. Due to limited availability of relevant public opinion data from Argentina during Perón's first two presidencies (1946–55), this portion of the analysis focuses on the more recent Venezuelan case.

Next, I analyze the trajectory of citizens' charismatic attachments after the death of the founder. In particular, I examine citizens' bonds at distinct junctures across the two movements: about forty years after the founder's death in Argentina (2013–16), and fewer than five years after the founder's death in Venezuela (2014–17). I begin with semi-structured interviews and focus groups with self-identified followers of Peronism and Chavismo. This exploratory investigation provides crucial insights regarding followers' relationship to the movement from their own perspectives. The interviews reveal detailed information about individual followers' experiences, whereas the focus groups allow for thought-provoking discussion among followers regarding their shared understandings of their connections to the movement (Berg 2001; Cyr 2016; Sugiyama and Hunter 2013). I use these data to explain the mechanisms through which followers' charismatic attachments to the movement cultivate an important and enduring political identity that can be reactivated by subsequent leaders.

In the third and final stage of follower-focused research, I conduct a survey experiment with 999 followers of Peronism and Chavismo in three diverse regions of Argentina and Venezuela, respectively, to test my theory on the reactivation of charismatic attachments. Specifically, I test the extent to which two strategies of new leaders – (1) the fulfillment of bold, initially impressive performance and (2) symbolic ties to the charismatic founder – strengthen followers' emotional bonds with the movement and increase political support for the successor. In the experimental setup, participants are randomly assigned to one of four conditions in which a new leader uses both of these strategies, only one of the two strategies, or neither strategy. By controlling for observable *and* unobservable factors that might otherwise confound the analysis, this random assignment allows me to parse out and directly assess the causal impact of the two (often-overlapping) strategies on followers' emotional ties (Druckman et al. 2011). In sum, I use public opinion data, interviews, focus groups, and survey experiments with followers of Peronism and Chavismo to

clarify the mechanisms through which their charismatic attachments form, endure, and become politically reactivated by new leaders.

1.4.2 The Supply Side of Charisma: Leader Strategies for Charismatic Movement Revival

On the supply side, I turn to elite interviews and archival research to trace the process through which new leaders succeeded or failed to reactivate citizens' charismatic attachments and restore the movement to power under their own authority. This method, which highlights the roles of timing and sequence (Bennett 2009; Collier 2011), permits a careful examination of important junctures in the development of Peronism and Chavismo and of the conditions that facilitated or impeded new leaders' attempts to employ strategies of reactivation and pick up the founder's charismatic mantle. Though it is difficult to obtain fresh insights from the perspective of movement leaders on these historical cases, my interviews with former leaders, campaign managers, and political strategists provide crucial information regarding the nature and effectiveness of the leaders' tactics for consolidating support, as well as whether and how the leaders associated themselves with the charismatic founders of the movement. Archival materials including newspaper articles, campaign posters, and public opinion polls from the relevant historical periods shed additional light on the context in which successors sought power, the leadership style they adopted, and the extent to which their campaigns resonated with the public.

Finally, I integrate the perspectives of followers and leaders to examine how charismatic movements unfold over time. Focusing on the case of Peronism, this historical analysis demonstrates how charismatic movements emerge with the meteoric rise of the founder and proceed in a wave-like pattern of booms and busts in which subsequent leaders come to power, temporarily reactivate the emotional vigor of citizens' identification with the movement, and inevitably sow the seeds of their own collapse. Specifically, I examine four waves of Peronism led by the founder Juan Perón (waves 1 and 2), Carlos Menem (wave 3), and Néstor and Cristina Kirchner (wave 4). I also briefly review the fifth and most recent wave of Peronism, which began with Alberto Fernández's rise to the presidency in 2019. The results illustrate the endogenous and fitful pattern that characterizes charismatic movements.

1.5 KEY CONCEPTS: CHARISMA, POPULISM, AND CHARISMATIC MOVEMENTS

This study lies at the intersection of two (in)famously contested concepts: charisma and populism. The former has long been invoked by scholars, pundits, and ordinary citizens to describe alluring leaders in diverse contexts, yet the precise meaning of the term remains ambiguous. This has led many social

scientists to spurn charisma as a “non-falsifiable” concept (Mudde 2007, 262) that is no more useful than an “amorphous and soggy sponge” (Worsley 1957).

Recently, populism has also become a political buzzword for academics and nonacademics alike. As Grzymala-Busse notes, “the term is everywhere: usually applied to political parties, but also used to characterize politicians, movements, grievances, demonstrations, policies, and electorates” (in Bernhard et al. 2020, 20). In fact, while the concept first appeared in the nineteenth century, references to it have exploded in the twenty-first century (Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017, 1–2). Yet, like charisma, populism’s slippery definition has stirred intense debate among scholars, earning it the label “weasel word,” which Bernhard describes as “a term . . . whose meaning is so imprecise or badly defined that it impedes the formulation of coherent thought on the subject to which it is applied, or leads to unsubstantiated conclusions” (Bernhard et al. 2020, 2).

Compounding the conceptual confusion around charisma and populism is the fact that the two terms are often used synonymously. Indeed, individual leaders whom people consider to be “populist” are often described as “charismatic”; similarly, the political movements and parties these leaders control are referred to with both terms. Nevertheless, many scholars claim that neither concept constitutes a definitional property of the other. For example, Weyland states that “a widespread belief in a leader’s amazing, extra-ordinary, and ‘supernatural’ capacities is a prime way in which the connection between leaders and followers can acquire the special intensity that gives rise to and sustains populism,” yet he also indicates that “charisma is not a definitional component of populism” (2017, 54). Similarly, Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser acknowledge that “populism is generally associated with a strong (male) leader, whose charismatic personal appeal, rather than ideological program, is the basis of *his* support” (2017, 6). However, the authors conclude that “populism is neither defined by nor wedded to a specific type of leader,” charismatic or otherwise (*ibid.*, 77).

I argue that the relationship between charisma and populism remains contested and uncertain due to an imbalance in the scholarly literature. Specifically, while research on populism has proliferated (e.g., Hawkins 2010; Hawkins et al. 2019; Kenny 2017; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017; Urbinati 2019; Weyland 2001, 2017), charisma has “rarely [been] analyzed and measured in political science” (Merolla and Zechmeister 2011, 29). To remedy this disparity and shed new light on the important connections between charisma and populism, this book places charisma front and center by tracing the development of charismatic attachments between leaders and followers in political settings that most would describe as populist.

To clarify my approach, I briefly review contrasting conceptualizations of charisma and populism that appear in the contemporary literature, identifying the definition of each that I find most valid and useful for the purposes of this study. I then introduce the concept of “charismatic movement,” which stands

at the heart of my analysis and best captures the intersection of charisma and populism. The subsequent section justifies the selection of Peronism and Chavismo, the two cases that constitute the main focus of this book.

1.5.1 Charisma

Weber, who developed the most important, seminal conceptualization of charisma, defines it as “a certain quality of individual personality by virtue of which he is considered extraordinary and treated as endowed with supernatural, superhuman, or at least specifically exceptional powers or qualities” (1922/1978, 241). Charisma has since been adopted in a widespread fashion to describe individuals – usually leaders – who possess intrinsic, magnetic appeal.

While intuitive, this interpretation of charisma has drawn criticism for two reasons. First, it suggests that charisma consists of a set of fixed, objective leader traits such as divine grace and extraordinariness, which are notoriously ambiguous and difficult to pin down (Antonakis et al. 2016, 301; Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 66). Second, this interpretation tends to treat charisma dichotomously: someone “is either charismatic or is not” (Eberhardt and Merolla 2017, 103). Approaching charisma as a set of universally understood, black-and-white, yet frustratingly elusive characteristics has resulted in much debate over who qualifies as “charismatic” and why, if at all, it matters.

In an effort to address these issues, others have emphasized a more subjective definition of charisma that highlights followers’ perceptions of the leader rather than the leader’s objective characteristics (e.g., Eberhardt and Merolla 2017; Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011; Madsen and Snow 1991; Merolla, Ramos, and Zechmeister 2007; Merolla and Zechmeister 2011; Urbinati 2019). These scholars look to Weber’s insistence that it is followers’ *recognition* of the leader’s traits – rather than the independent existence of those traits – that form the foundation of charismatic authority. Thus, these authors conclude that charisma is a characteristic or attribute that is *conferred* on the leader by the followers (Eberhardt and Merolla 2017, 104; Haslam, Reicher, and Platow 2011, 245; Steffens et al. 2017, 530). This subjective understanding of charisma has important advantages. For one, it does not require universal consensus regarding what it is that makes the leader inherently “exceptional”; instead, it suggests that charisma exists to the extent that the followers *regard* their leader as exceptional, however defined. Second, it interprets charisma in relative rather than absolute terms: charismatic perceptions can range on a continuum from weak to strong and can shift in intensity across time, contexts, and individual followers (Bass and Avolio 1995; Eberhardt and Merolla 2017; Merolla, Ramos, and Zechmeister 2007).

Despite these improvements, the subjective conceptualization of charisma introduces another problem: It highlights the charismatic “effect,” or the intended outcome of charismatic leadership, rather than charisma itself

(Antonakis et al. 2016, 302). In fact, charisma does not consist of connections between leaders and followers; rather, it creates those connections. Examining the establishment and impact of charismatic attachments is itself a worthy endeavor – indeed, it is the primary objective of this book – yet it would be misguided to conflate these bonds with the phenomenon that led to their formation in the first place.

In light of these issues and debates, I contend that charisma is a property of leadership that, when applied under certain conditions, encounters massive receptivity and therefore results in the establishment (or reactivation) of charismatic attachments between leaders and their followers. Specifically, in keeping with Antonakis and his colleagues in the field of business management, I define charisma as a type of leadership that signals through both words and actions a particular set of symbols and values that, in certain circumstances, resonates on a deeply personal and affective level with the intended audience (Antonakis et al. 2016, 304). As I will elaborate in Chapters 2 and 3, leaders signal and exert their charisma in three ways: They (1) directly recognize the genuine and undeserved suffering of their followers, (2) vow to personally resolve the people's misery through bold action, and (3) use emotional, quasi-religious symbols and rhetoric to cultivate a mission of profound societal transformation designed to defeat evil forces and provide the followers with a prosperous future. The extent to which followers recognize, fall for, and respond to a leader's charisma is influenced by both the leader's individual characteristics (e.g., their personality, communication skills, and experience) and contextual circumstances.

If executed when many people suffer from serious problems and therefore long for a savior, charisma allows the leader to establish (or reactivate) charismatic attachments: linkages with followers that are unmediated, asymmetrical, and deeply emotional in nature. The *unmediated* quality of these attachments implies that the leader communicates directly with the followers rather than using intermediary bureaucratic channels. The *asymmetry* of the bonds arises because the leader maintains an exalted position over the followers and therefore enjoys unmatched power and commands their unwavering loyalty. Indeed, the qualities that followers perceive in the leader “are not accessible to the ordinary person, but are regarded as of divine origin or as exemplary” (Weber 1922/1978, 231). Although the leader is unlikely to possess divine roots in reality, the followers' perception of divinity substantiates the leader's charisma and justifies his/her influence over them. Finally, the *emotional* character of charismatic attachments inspires the followers to feel “intense devotion to and extraordinary reverence for the leader” (Madsen and Snow 1991, 5). The combination of these features makes the followers feel that they have a unique and intimate relationship with the leader. It also convinces them to relinquish control over their lives to the leader, whom they perceive as their savior.

How, then, does charisma apply to the political arena? I argue that politicians can exercise charisma to cultivate unmediated, asymmetrical, and

emotional attachments with their followers across a wide spectrum of organizational settings. Just as voters in the United States can worship Franklin Delano Roosevelt or Barack Obama as their redeemer, so can Chinese citizens praise Mao Zedong as their ultimate hero. While these leaders vastly differed in ruling strategy and organization, they all may be considered charismatic because they recognized the unjust suffering of their people, vowed to boldly resolve it, and, in doing so, crafted a mission of salvation. Despite their many differences, these signals enabled these leaders to develop unmediated, top-down, and deeply affective connections to their most devout supporters; thus, all three came to be viewed by these supporters as quasi-divine saviors.

Though charismatic attachments can develop in strikingly diverse contexts, the political relevance of these attachments varies based on the extent to which leaders rely on the personalistic authority they derive from these attachments to govern. Neither fully democratic nor clearly totalitarian leaders use charisma as their primary source of power. On the democratic end of the spectrum, leaders such as FDR, Obama, and Brazil's Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva cultivated charismatic attachments with a significant number of voters, yet they governed primarily based on "rational" laws and institutions. On the totalitarian end of the spectrum, Mao and Adolf Hitler also enjoyed the unwavering, emotionally driven loyalty of many citizens, but relied far more on ruthless, overt repression than charismatic bonds to rule. In contrast to these liberal-democratic and totalitarian extremes, as I will explain subsequently, leaders who rely predominantly on charismatic attachments to assert their authority thrive best in "populist" settings.

1.5.2 Populism

An "essentially contested concept," populism has undergone various definitional transformations since it emerged in the nineteenth century in the United States, Russia, and France (Rovira Kaltwasser et al. 2017, 2–4). While scholars have debated the term's true meaning for decades, the recent surge in political leaders and parties considered "populist" has injected these discussions with renewed urgency. Although several conceptualizations of populism exist, contemporary scholars tend to subscribe to one of two approaches: one ideational and the other political-strategic.²

Proponents of the ideational approach define populism as "a thin-centered ideology that considers society to be ultimately separated into two homogeneous and antagonistic camps, 'the pure people' versus 'the corrupt elite,' and which argues that politics should be an expression of the *volonté générale* (general will) of the people" (Mudde and Rovira Kaltwasser 2017, 5). This

² Other conceptualizations understand populism as an expression of popular agency (Goodwyn 1978), a political style (Moffitt and Tormey 2014), an economic program (Sachs 1989), a sociocultural identity (Ostiguy 2017), and a form of political emancipation (Laclau 2005).

definition emphasizes three components: the virtuous “people,” who are the key protagonists of the populist cause; the malevolent “elites,” who encompass all who oppose the populist cause; and the “general will,” or the source that unites the people and justifies their mission to vanquish the selfish and morally bankrupt elites (ibid., 9–14).

At its core, the ideational approach understands populism to be independent of the context from which it emerges. It is a highly flexible discourse that virtually anybody can adopt and perform, for any period of time. As a “thin-centered” ideology, it can be combined with any left–right ideological position, political project, or regime type (ibid., 5). Theoretically, then, any leader, party, or ordinary citizen could become populist simply by taking up the rhetoric dividing “the people” and “the elites.” Moreover, while charismatic leaders are by far the greatest producers of populist rhetoric, charisma has no place in the ideational definition (ibid., 77).

In contrast, the political–strategic approach promotes a more specific definition of populism that incorporates the political context and focuses on the connection between “the people” and the leader who claims to represent them. Weyland, an early adopter of this approach, states that “Populism is best defined as a political strategy through which a personalistic leader seeks or exercises government power based on direct, unmediated, uninstitutionalized support from large numbers of mostly unorganized followers” (2001, 14). Rather than mere discourse that praises “the people” while attacking “the elites,” this interpretation defines populism as a holistic strategy used by political leaders to mobilize support and *take power* (ibid., 12; Urbinati 2019, 34). In other words, populism constitutes a distinct political force characterized by intense personalism. Unlike leaders in programmatic parties who mobilize support through the party’s firmly established apparatus, populist leaders bypass institutional channels to connect with and secure the devotion of their supporters in a quasi-direct and seemingly intimate fashion. Only through establishing unmediated linkages with voters can populists achieve their ultimate goal: leveraging the fervent support of the masses to exercise unchecked authority.

To be sure, the political-strategic definition of populism acknowledges the important role of Manichean rhetoric outlined by the ideational approach. However, it maintains that this discourse matters only insofar as it helps the leader convince the supporters that he/she personally embodies their will and therefore deserves their unfaltering loyalty (Weyland 2017, 58–59). As Urbinati states, “The populist leader is *emotionally* and *propagandistically* active in his daily effort to reconquer the authorization of the people” (2019, 117, emphasis added). In contrast to liberal democracy, which embraces a spirit of pluralism, promotes competition between multiple parties, and imposes a system of institutional checks and balances, populist movements stress that sacred leaders and their “people” constitute the *only* source of legitimate power and deem all opponents to be unworthy of representation (ibid., 114–15).

I contend that the political–strategic approach offers the most precise definition of populism because it makes clear the important role of charismatic attachments. Specifically, this interpretation suggests that the populist leader’s objective of obtaining and exercising power rests fundamentally on his/her capacity to cultivate charismatic – unmediated, asymmetrical, and emotional – attachments with his/her followers. As mentioned previously, it is true that non-populist leaders ranging from democratic presidents and prime ministers to totalitarian dictators can use charisma to establish these attachments with their supporters. Whereas these leaders complement their charismatic influence with other strategies and mechanisms, charismatic connections form the basis by which populist leaders win and exercise power.

1.5.3 Charismatic Movement

Throughout this book, I use the term “charismatic movement” to describe the group of people bound together by unmediated, asymmetrical, and emotional bonds to the charismatic leader and his/her mission of redemption. While each follower perceives their connection to the leader as profoundly personal, the shared identity that emerges from these attachments, and the influence these bonds grant the charismatic leader, constitute a powerful and potentially transformational force.

Because populist leaders rely so heavily on charismatic attachments to establish and exercise power, I argue that populism constitutes the purest and most powerful form of charismatic movement in the political sphere. However, charismatic movements – like charisma itself – can complement other forms of authority across a range of regime types and can even emerge outside of politics.

As mentioned earlier, in Brazil’s liberal-democratic setting, Lula governed as the head of a programmatic, center-left political party (Hunter 2010). He also consolidated the fervent support of an important base of followers from the country’s impoverished Northern and Northeastern regions using his charismatic appeal rather than his party affiliation. Consequently, the number of citizens who identified personally with the leader and who viewed him as their savior (*lulistas*) outnumbered those who identified with his party (*petistas*) (de Souza 2011, 75, 88; Hunter and Power 2019, 69; Samuels and Zucco 2014, 130). Furthermore, though Lula’s charismatic movement never subsumed the programmatic Workers’ Party he helped found, its resilient influence unquestionably impacted succession politics – a process I explain in Chapter 6. Indeed, like other charismatic movement founders, Lula struggled to anoint a compelling presidential successor. His first handpicked heir, Dilma Rousseff, suffered a terrible crisis of legitimacy and was ultimately impeached in 2016. In the 2018 elections, after Lula was barred from running at the eleventh hour, he personally selected yet another uninspiring presidential candidate, Fernando Haddad, who covered his own face with a mask of Lula on the campaign trail in a

desperate attempt to borrow Lula's appeal, but lost the election to the right-wing fringe candidate, Jair Bolsonaro (Hunter and Power 2019).

Charismatic movements can also emerge within totalitarian regimes. For example, as discussed earlier, Mao relied primarily on his well-organized and ideologically cohesive Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to assert totalitarian control. Yet, he also used charisma to establish profound, unmediated bonds with millions of Chinese citizens – especially with those who became his Red Guard, the “true believers” who were “blindly devoted to Mao” (Andreas 2007, 438). Periodically, Mao leveraged his charismatic movement to shake up the CCP and reassert his personal grip on power, most notably by launching the Cultural Revolution in 1966.

Finally, charismatic movements can develop outside of politics, often in the form of (pseudo-)religious cults such as Sun Myung Moon's Unification Church (known as the “Moonies”), Marshall Applewhite's Heaven's Gate, Jim Jones' People's Temple, and Keith Raniere's NXIVM. Similar to their political counterparts, Singer states that these groups take the shape of “an inverted T,” in which “the leader is alone at the top, and the followers are all at the bottom” (Singer 2003, 8). Cult leaders use charisma to entice their followers: They recognize their followers' suffering, claim to be endowed with unique – even miraculous – power to resolve this suffering, and declare a mission to forge a “simple path to happiness, to success, to salvation” (Zimbardo 1997). These leaders establish profound, emotional bonds with their followers and thus enjoy tremendous influence over them. Using these bonds, cult leaders build charismatic movements that often engage in a range of controlling and destructive behaviors, some of which even culminate in mass homicidal and suicidal acts (Bohm and Alison 2001; Hassan 1990).

As I explain in the subsequent section, this book focuses on charismatic movements in the political sphere. In fact, I focus on charismatic movements that constitute a leader's main basis for winning and exercising power and that therefore also qualify as populist. However, I use the former concept rather than the latter as the foundation of my analysis in order to shed light on charisma's essential role in the establishment and revival of these movements. Although many populism experts view charisma as a prominent feature of these movements, few consider it to be a definitional property. In contrast, I view charisma as the indispensable glue that holds these movements together – even after their original leaders disappear. Moreover, my analysis may be extended in the future to study charismatic movements in other contexts, including diverse political regimes and nonpolitical settings.

1.6 CASE SELECTION

This book focuses on two charismatic movements in Latin America that emerged, survived, and profoundly transformed the political trajectories of their respective countries: Peronism and Chavismo. I prioritize these cases for

several reasons. First, they represent *typical* cases of charismatic movement survival (Seawright and Gerring 2008, 299). As will be detailed in subsequent chapters, both movements have survived beyond the deaths of their founders and have had a dramatic and enduring impact on political behavior and the organization of the party system. Yet the causal mechanisms underlying the resilience of the two movements remain poorly understood. Concentrating on these important instances of charismatic movement survival allows for a deep exploration of causal mechanisms involved.

Second, while examining only “positive” cases, my examination of followers and leaders within each movement provides variation on important dimensions of the dependent variable, charismatic movement survival. At the level of the followers, I analyze variation in the strength of charismatic attachments and political support for successors. At the level of the leaders, I assess variation in successors’ attempts to revive the movement. In particular, I investigate the process through which some leaders succeeded while others failed to return the movement to power. The variation in these two dimensions – the intensity of followers’ charismatic attachments and new leaders’ ability to restore the movement to power – provides me with the analytic leverage to assess, on one hand, the competing explanations rooted in routinization and, on the other hand, personalistic revival.

Third, Peronism and Chavismo have unfolded in different geographical and historical contexts, allowing for a direct analysis of charismatic movement survival at distinct junctures. Peronism emerged in Latin America’s Southern Cone with Juan Perón’s rise to power in the mid-1940s, whereas Chavismo came to power in the Andean region with Hugo Chávez’s presidential victory in 1998, over fifty years later. Peronism has survived for over seven decades and has experienced rule under several successors, including Isabel Perón, Carlos Menem, Eduardo Duhalde, Néstor Kirchner, Cristina Kirchner, and most recently, Alberto Fernández. Conversely, at the time of writing, Chavismo has survived just seven years since the death of its founder and has been governed by a single successor: Nicolás Maduro. I take advantage of these differences to examine first-hand two important stages in charismatic movement survival: long-lasting (in Argentina) and still developing (in Venezuela).

1.7 OVERVIEW

The remainder of the book is organized as follows. Part I (the present chapter and Chapter 2) lays out the theoretical discussion. Specifically, Chapter 2 details explanations for the survival of charismatic movements that are rooted in the logic of routinization and presents my alternative theory of charismatic movement revival.

Part II analyzes the establishment and revival of charismatic movements from the demand side by investigating the formation (Chapter 3), survival (Chapter 4), and political reactivation (Chapter 5) of followers’ attachments.

Chapter 3 identifies how these attachments initially develop, overwhelm alternative linkage types, and contribute to the formation of powerful political movements. I focus this analysis on the case of Venezuela due to the relatively fresh status of citizens' attachments to Chavismo. Combining insights from classic studies of charisma with empirical analyses of voters devoted to Chávez and his movement, I develop a compact theory on the formation of charismatic attachments. Subsequently, I use data from a 2007 survey by the Latin American Public Opinion Project to test the influence of charismatic perceptions of Chávez on citizens' attachments to the movement relative to competing factors rooted in the movement's substantive programs and grassroots organizations. The results indicate the disproportionate influence of charismatic leadership on citizens' ties to the movement.

Chapter 4 examines the staying power of charismatic movements by exploring the mechanisms through which followers' attachments cultivate a resilient, charismatic political identity that survives after the disappearance of the founder. Focus group discussions with followers of Peronism and Chavismo reveal how the factors involved in the original formation of citizens' affective bonds – including the leader's direct recognition of the followers, impressive performance, and narrative of salvation – facilitate the perpetuation of those attachments and reinforce their profound identification with the movement. In particular, the focus groups illustrate how followers sustain their unmediated, deeply emotional bonds with the founder by holding onto stories and material possessions symbolizing their transformative experiences under the founder. The discussions also indicate how followers' resilient charismatic identity shapes their understanding of politics and provide a pathway for new politicians who portray themselves as heroic reincarnations of the founder to win the followers' loyalty.

To complete the analysis from the demand side, Chapter 5 investigates how followers' emotional attachments to the movement can be politically reactivated to facilitate new leaders' consolidation of power. Face-to-face survey experiments conducted with movement followers in Argentina and Venezuela indicate that leaders who implement two strategies – (1) bold, initially impressive policies and (2) symbolic associations with the charismatic founder – cause citizens to express stronger emotional attachment to the movement and increased support for the new leader. The results further challenge the notion that charismatic attachments are short-lived and underscore the potential of new leaders to resurrect the political salience of those attachments.

Part III turns to the supply side by examining the conditions under which new leaders can implement the abovementioned strategies to consolidate power as new standard-bearers of the movement. Chapter 6 identifies three conditions that successors must fulfill to accomplish this task: They must seek power on their own terms after the founder's disappearance, rise in the midst of a crisis to portray themselves as desperately needed saviors, and adopt the founder's personalistic style to revitalize and take ownership of the followers' preexisting

emotional bonds to the movement. To demonstrate the relevance of these conditions, I examine the process through which several successors failed while others succeeded in reviving three charismatic movements in Latin America: Peronism, Chavismo, and Fujimorismo in Peru.

Given the conditions that facilitate new leaders' successful revival of charismatic movements, Chapter 7 investigates the trajectories of these movements starting from the moment when their founders disappear. Focusing on Peronism, which has survived over forty years since the death of its founder, I trace the history of the movement from Perón's rise in 1943 until 2019, when Peronist candidate Alberto Fernández rose to power after defeating the non-Peronist incumbent president, Mauricio Macri. The analysis illustrates how, by sustaining its personalistic nature, Peronism has unfolded in a spasmodic fashion that contrasts with the more stable, linear trajectories of conventional parties.

Chapter 8 summarizes key empirical findings of the study, draws theoretical conclusions about the potential for charismatic movements to bypass routinization and live on in personalistic form, and reflects on the challenges these movements pose for democracy. It also extends the analysis to cases beyond Argentina and Venezuela where charismatic movements persisted or reemerged after the disappearance of their founders, including Fujimorismo in Peru, Forza Italia in Italy, the Pheu Thai Party in Thailand, and Maoism in China. Finally, I explore the broader implications that my theory of personalistic revival holds for the potential staying power and consequences of charismatic populist leaders, who are on the rise in countries across the world.